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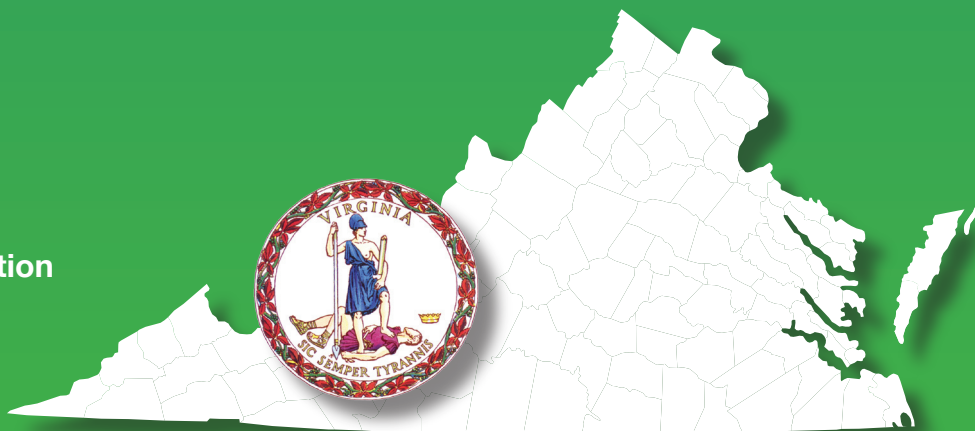
Bringing High School Successful Practices to Scale in Virginia

WHAT WORKS:
A Comprehensive Study
of 10 Successful High Schools
in the Commonwealth

December 2007

Prepared by the
International Center
for Leadership in Education

for the
Virginia Department
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Bringing High School Successful Practices to Scale in Virginia can be found in PDF file format on the Virginia Department of Education's Web site at www.doe.virginia.gov.

Table of Contents

Foreword

The United States education system is raising the bar for high school students but has lacked consensus on how best to accomplish the task of combining the challenges of college and workplace readiness for all students while simultaneously closing achievement gaps. The National Governors Association (NGA) released its *Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools* in 2005. The issues highlighted in the report are reflected in Virginia's high schools. Providing information to schools on successful practices involves not only examining schools with high pass rates on Virginia's *Standards of Learning* assessments but also looking at schools that are experiencing success with a variety of student populations.

Systematic gathering of practitioner-based information and documenting of successful models make sense at any time, but especially within the mandate of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* and its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision. Virginia's education leaders want proven, practical, and replicable models they can use not only to meet the stringent requirements of NCLB but also to provide their students—especially those at risk—with the best possible learning environments to prepare them for future roles and success in college and adult life.

In July 2005, the Commonwealth of Virginia was the recipient of an NGA Honor States grant award. Virginia's program was a cooperative effort of the Governor's Office, the Secretary of Education, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the Virginia Community College System, and the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals working together to improve high school programs and student achievement. As part of the grant, the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) conducted a study in Virginia to identify high-performing high schools in the Commonwealth and review the practices and policies that contribute to their success. ICLE has conducted similar studies on the most successful high schools in the country and has replicated its established criteria and protocols as part of the study of Virginia schools. The study followed two primary steps:

1. Identify exemplars of Virginia's success stories in achieving higher academic standards for all students, with special emphasis on the success of diverse populations.
2. Document the instructional and organizational strategies that have proved to be of greatest value in moving all students to academic success through individual school case studies and a summary report.

The ICLE Learning Criteria were used to identify the 10 models for in-depth study. A cross-section of successful urban, suburban, and rural schools was selected. The socioeconomic status of the schools' populations ranged from high need to average need. Care was taken to ensure that the 10 schools reflected the ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of the state.

This report should inform critical discussions already taking place across the Commonwealth. School divisions struggling with issues that affect student success in high school may want to review strategies of the schools in the study that are demographically similar to their own and use the lessons learned therein to help further their own success.

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Acknowledgments

Bringing High School Successful Practices to Scale in Virginia

Executive Summary

The 10 schools that provide the foundation for the *Bringing High School Successful Practices to Scale in Virginia* initiative, cosponsored by the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) and the Virginia Department of Education, have provided insight into school policies and instructional practices that are associated with student success across a number of high school indicators. The results have identified common factors that lead to high performance on statewide assessments and are associated with success among all student populations.

The purpose of the initiative was to identify high school exemplars in Virginia that have had great success in helping all students complete an academically rigorous and relevant curriculum, with special emphasis on the struggling learners subgroups. The ICLE would then bring these best practices to scale in the Commonwealth by documenting the instructional and organizational strategies proven to be of greatest value in moving all students to achieve high academic standards.

Selection of the 10 schools was based on several criteria. Care was taken to ensure that each school met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), achieved full accreditation status in Virginia for the past two years, and had a ninth grade retention rate of 12 percent or less. Schools meeting these criteria were sorted by Superintendents' Regions, and student populations were analyzed to ensure that they accurately reflected the demography of Virginia. Additional state testing data and other student achievement indicators, such as graduation and attendance rates, were used to select schools that were ethnically diverse, had a relatively large economically disadvantaged population, and/or had a relatively large special education population.

Once the schools were identified, ICLE, in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education, conducted a two-day site visit at each school to identify strengths, document successful practices, and ascertain how the school is ensuring that all students 1) experience growth every year, 2) move to and beyond proficiency, and 3) benefit from a rigorous and relevant curriculum.

Senior consultants from ICLE and a representative from the Virginia Department of Education conducted the site visits. To ensure consistency, a protocol was established, and one senior consultant participated in all 10 visits. A comprehensive case study was then developed for each high school, documenting how the school has successfully met the academic and social needs of students. *(See Appendix B for school case studies.)*

Studying the 10 schools revealed that not all schools are at the same stage of the redesign effort. Staff in seven of the schools had clear memories of the process in which they participated in deciding why the school needed to change and what should be changed to create a culture of high expectations for all students, while in three of the schools, this culture predated most, if not all, of the current staff. Most evident in these three schools was the commitment to maintain and extend the traditional culture of high expectations.

In visiting the 10 high schools, ICLE consultants identified a list of eight characteristics that distinguished these achievement-focused schools:

Commitment to Academic Excellence and High Expectations
High-performing schools believe that all students can and must achieve high standards. They have core academic priorities and address them well. They recognize that *No Child Left Behind*, AYP, and state testing programs create the floor for what all students need to achieve. Successful schools create a clear understanding of both behavioral and academic expectations for staff and students.

These highly successful schools also commit to creating relationships with students that will nurture, motivate, and guide them. That teachers know their students and often their families well helps create an environment that enables all students to achieve high standards.

Core and Stretch Learning Opportunities
High-performing schools extend rigorous learning opportunities to all students. The schools have reduced and/or eliminated options for students to elect less rigorous courses in the core content areas. In several of the schools, no barriers to the selection of high-level courses exist. Guidance programs play a critical role in preventing the development of artificial barriers to the scheduling of rigorous programs. In several schools, the master schedule has been collapsed to eliminate lower-level courses. All schools have extensive Advanced Placement course offerings, either on-site or via distance learning programs. Several schools offer International Baccalaureate programs. All schools also offer dual-enrollment programs. The case studies reveal that a high number of students leave high school with more than six college credit hours. In every school, there are numerous opportunities for students to elect and enjoy success in strong core programs.

Student Engagement Schoolwide
Significant evidence of student engagement was pervasive in all of the schools. The interpersonal relationships form a critical piece of the culture in each school and provide a platform to focus instruction around a student's interests, learning style, and aptitudes. Students and educators develop relationships over an extended period of time. These relationships prove to be essential in motivating and nurturing students, contribute to a sense of mutual responsibility for student success, and seem closely related to the levels of support provided to students. In all instances, regardless of school size, the sense of caring and support is enhanced by the staff's commitment to the creation of a "family" atmosphere involving the schoolwide sharing of responsibility for student behavior, achievement, and success.

High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction
The 10 high schools have high-quality curriculum to guide instruction and have moved beyond curriculum to create an instructional framework for students to use in the development of skills and in learning to apply those skills. Teachers across disciplines interact on an ongoing basis. Business and postsecondary partnerships enrich instruction. In many of these schools, students are given time for reflection about the knowledge they are gaining and the applications of that knowledge. Teachers also have time for reflective thought and access to good data to guide instructional decisions.

Personal Skill Development
Closely related to high levels of student engagement is the availability of co-curricular and extracurricular programs that provide numerous opportunities for students to explore interests and develop personal skills identified as critical for the 21st century. These offerings were frequently cited as an important source of connection between students and their teacher/advisors. Programs that integrate academics with extensive leadership opportunities continue to be a core strength in the 10 schools. Programs like Future Farmers of America, Future Business Leaders of America, and visual and performing arts provide students with rigor, relevance, and relationships along with exceptional opportunities for personal skill development and service learning experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis
The schools focus on data that assists classroom teachers' daily instructional decisions. Teachers use a wide variety of summative and formative data sources to analyze students' achievement levels and how those achievement levels compare to what will be required of students upon high school graduation. Many of the schools also collect data pertaining to student satisfaction and engagement. All data are used as input to instructional decisions and are communicated to students, parents, and other stakeholders on an ongoing basis. The most successful schools have incorporated extensive data analysis into the identification of at-risk, incoming students, so as to provide appropriate and meaningful support for students likely to experience difficulties in rigorous courses.

Transition (Ninth Grade and Twelfth Grade)
Ninth grade in many of these exemplar schools looks different from ninth grade in other schools. Students' academic levels are analyzed before they enter ninth grade. If students do not have adequate academic skills to succeed in the high school curriculum, they are enrolled in transitional support programs. These programs have become an essential part of the process used to ensure student success. Effective transition planning begins well before ninth grade and reflects a close collaboration between middle level and high school staffs.

By the end of grade nine, these students have typically made measurable improvements in basic skills, enabling them to complete a rigorous high school curriculum. They have also been indoctrinated into a culture of high expectations and caring adults. Although formalized programs, such as ninth-grade academies, are not in all schools, each school has crafted rich programs to maximize the chances of student success, both personally and academically.

In a number of schools studied, upper-class students serve as mentors to ninth-grade students. The upperclassmen model expected behaviors, provide ongoing guidance, and, in many cases, tutor struggling underclassmen. Often the selection of the mentors for such programs is designed to provide growth opportunities for the older students.

Twelfth grade can look different in these schools as well. For students who entered ninth grade with adequate academic preparation, the four-year program may be collapsed into three years. These students complete a high school curriculum in three years and use grade 12 as an advanced placement year. Through strong articulation with higher education, students may earn up to 30 college credits by the time of high school graduation.

Between those who need enrichment programs in grade nine and those who can complete up to 30 college credits by the end of grade 12, a wide variety of students exists. Academies are used with this group of students, as with the others, to design an academic program built around a thematic approach that meets the students' interests, learning styles, and aptitudes.

Leadership
In each school, the impact of thoughtful, reflective leadership is evident. It is not unusual for this leadership to be collaborative. In fact, in all of the schools, considerable attention was called to the strong sense of administrative support and respect for teachers. Equally clear was the manner in which this climate permeated the schools. A sense of mutual respect exists in these schools among the school leaders, the students, and the staff. In all but two instances, the principals have been in the position long enough to sustain change within the school.

The leaders in the schools are highly visible and aggressive in their pursuit of the desired school climate. They are committed to establishing and implementing a vision of high expectations and an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning. Staff members recognize and appreciate the efforts of the school leaders to provide for their instructional needs and to preserve the "sanctity" of instructional time. Without exception, staff members noted the willingness of school leaders to listen, to reflect, and to explain decisions.

Bringing High School Successful Practices to Scale in Virginia

Introduction

To assist policymakers and school districts in understanding potential solutions for improving secondary education, the Virginia Department of Education has collaborated with the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) on an initiative designed to bring effective educational practices to scale. The goal of *Bringing High School Successful Practices to Scale in Virginia* was to identify sustainable, flexible, and powerful solutions to enable *all* students to complete an academically rigorous and relevant curriculum. This objective has been at the core of ICLE's mission for more than a decade.

The systematic gathering of practitioner-based information and the sharing of successful models and practices make sense at any time, but especially within the mandate of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision. Now more than ever, education leaders want proven, practical, and replicable models they can use not only to meet AYP requirements but also to provide their students with the best possible learning environments to prepare them for success in college, the workplace, and adult life.

The Virginia Department of Education and ICLE selected the following 10 schools for the study:

- Centreville High School, Fairfax County
- Chatham High School, Pittsylvania County
- Douglas S. Freeman High School, Henrico County
- George Wythe High School, Wythe County
- James River High School, Chesterfield County
- Princess Anne High School, Virginia Beach City
- Randolph-Henry High School, Charlotte County
- Smithfield High School, Isle of Wight County
- Turner Ashby High School, Rockingham County
- West Point High School, Town of West Point

High schools were selected from among schools that had made AYP under the provisions of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, achieved full accreditation under the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* for the past two years, and had a ninth grade retention rate less than 12 percent. Schools were sorted by Superintendents' Regions to ensure regional representation. The demographics of the student population and *Standards of Learning* assessment pass rates, as well as graduation and attendance rates, were also considered.

The following section details best practices from the 10 schools in the areas explored in the initiative. Case studies from which this information was extracted are found in Appendix B.

Now more than ever, education leaders want proven, practical, and replicable models they can use not only to meet AYP requirements but also to provide their students with the best possible learning environments to prepare them for success in college, the workplace, and adult life.

Key Findings

The 10 high schools included in *Bringing High School Best Practices to Scale in Virginia* have provided insight into how high schools in Virginia can help *all* students complete an academically rigorous and relevant curriculum. Each school provides examples of excellent practices that characterize model schools across the nation. The following sections provide detailed information from the site visits and case studies. Although each school might provide best practices in each key component, with the exception of the first category, this report focused on the most intentional actions in select schools.

1. Culture of High Expectations and Support. A culture in which there are clear expectations evidenced in focused, well-articulated mission statements, sustained student relationships with adults, a high degree of accountability, and an environment that is safe, ethical, and authoritative in which adults teach, model, and expect responsible behavior.

All of the schools provided excellent and highly individualized examples of environments in which high expectations for students and staff were the norm rather than the exception. Environments of high expectations were instrumental in the creation of schools where distractions were minimal, a focus on what mattered was central, and student/staff relationships were exceptionally strong.

In several instances, the culture of high expectations had been a part of the school's history for longer than present staff can recall. West Point High School and Douglas S. Freeman High School serve as excellent examples of such historical commitments to high student achievement. Douglas S. Freeman leaders captured the essence of the culture when they described the commitment to high expectations that greeted incoming students as being "in the bricks." Both schools evidenced clear efforts to preserve and extend the environment.

In other cases, school leaders and staff indicated that the first steps in creating a climate of high expectations involved the establishment of order and respect. In these schools, leaders had crafted intentional and deliberate programs, initiatives, and commitments to establish such a climate. As a result, student behavioral issues consumed a minor portion of the school's energy.

The following examples from the case studies detail ways in which schools excelled in the creation of a culture of high expectations, both academically and socially.

Centreville High School's (Fairfax County) philosophy, "to excel in all endeavors," guides the efforts of everyone in the school. One indicator of Centreville's commitment to student success is the design of the daily schedule. Students follow a seven-credit program over the course of the year, with 90-minute classes on alternating days. In addition, the school

Environments of high expectations were instrumental in the creation of schools where distractions were minimal, a focus on what mattered was central, and student/staff relationships were exceptionally strong.

has implemented a Practice, Learn, Understand, Study (PLUS) program that provides flexible time designed to help all students succeed. Each day, students have a 30-minute period to obtain additional support from a teacher or other mentor, engage in enrichment activities, or study in a supervised setting. Adding to the high-expectation culture is the celebration of diversity in this "minority-majority" school. Students do not self-divide along racial or ethnic lines, and parents are given extra support if English is not their first language.

Chatham High School (Pittsylvania County) maintains an environment in which learning takes place within the parameters of a clear code of conduct. The teachers and school leaders have used the pressure to pass the state's *Standards of Learning* assessments for graduation as a means of helping students recognize the connection between hard work and goal attainment. They have extended this lesson to the belief that all students are capable of high-quality work with sufficient effort and support. The school's leaders have incorporated exciting learning opportunities, such as dual-enrollment courses and an engaging engineering course. The school has also had amazing success among its underperforming subgroups (68 percent of the student population).

Douglas S. Freeman High School (Henrico County) operates under the strong belief—frequently expressed by administrators and teachers—that students will live up to expectations. This school has been exceptionally successful in integrating the influx of limited-English-proficient students into the daily life of the school. Students and staff indicated that there is little or no separation among various ethnic groups. Students feel safe. Teachers new to the school comment on the unique environment of respect that has been created at Douglas S. Freeman.

George Wythe High School (Wythe County) has a warm and welcoming atmosphere that is immediately evident. The culture of the school is defined by a climate of high expectations and the commitment of the staff to the maintenance of a caring and supportive atmosphere. It is clear that the adults in the George Wythe school community have accepted the need to develop and maintain strong, supportive relationships with students. Students feel safe and respected by adults. Teachers devote many hours to providing students with individual attention. They demonstrate a strong belief that students can excel and that they are expected to do so in academics, sports, extracurricular activities, and their postgraduate lives.

James River High School's (Chesterfield County) success is clear upon entering the building. The front hallways are lined with inspiring artwork and plaques, and the theme of excellence reaches into the classrooms, the offices, and the common areas. To uphold its success, the school implemented a freshman-mentoring program. An upper-class student is paired with five freshmen and acts as a mentor and guide throughout the year. Another powerful program that reflects the school's commitment to success is the Triple Prep program. This program is designed around the ideas of engagement, enrichment, and exposure so that the needs of an increasing at-risk population can be met regardless of the student's achievement level. Faculty members are encouraged to be risk-takers.

This school has been exceptionally successful in integrating the influx of limited-English-proficient students into the daily life of the school. Students and staff indicated that there is little or no separation among various ethnic groups.

When new ideas are generated, thoughtful consideration is given to the effects of the ideas across the board and to the long-term impacts of decisions.

Princess Anne High School (Virginia Beach City) has a culture that is warm, inviting, and characterized by high expectations. Students emphasized the caring staff and their willingness to provide extra help (even on weekends) as key elements in their high level of respect for the staff. The school's continuous improvement is built around a well-organized, sophisticated, and comprehensive system of data collection, analysis, goal setting, and action planning. This is a student-focused school with clear expectations and accountability measures for students and adults.

Randolph-Henry High School (Charlotte County) outlines what is expected of students, and it is obvious that they accept and understand these expectations. This mutual understanding has helped create a warm and welcoming atmosphere at the school. A "Take 10" period at the beginning of each day provides the opportunity for students to interact with peers not in their classes in an "advisory" setting. Administrators and staff are highly visible, and they gently, but effectively, reinforce expectations for behavior, dress, and values. Randolph-Henry's mission is used as a guide and propels the school forward as it maintains high standards.

Smithfield High School (Isle of Wight County) has reinvented itself through teacher involvement, data analysis, instructional responses, formative assessments, and the creation of benchmarks for the evaluation of progress (both intermediate and longer term performance targets). There is a set of clear expectations for both teachers and students. Planning for each student's future begins immediately upon entrance to Smithfield, with the creation of a jointly developed school plan designed to identify and support the student's interests. This plan is updated annually and course schedules are matched with the plan. To maintain high levels of academic excellence, administrators and staff understand that continuous change and growth will be necessary. They are constantly looking for ways to increase the levels of learning and achievement for every student and group of students at the school.

Turner Ashby High School (Rockingham County) exemplifies commitment to high levels of learning and engagement through its CORE program. CORE targets incoming freshmen and provides tutoring and additional support for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks. Some students have even elected to put themselves in the CORE program, knowing that they may need extra help. This culture of support for every student is also reflected in the willingness of the staff to be available to students for tutoring and mentoring beyond the limits of the school day. In addition, Turner Ashby has a safe and stable environment, due to a schoolwide discipline policy that has a clearly delineated set of procedures and consequences.

West Point High School (Town of West Point) maintains its climate of excellence via clear expectations of what students must do to succeed.

A "Take 10" period at the beginning of each day provides the opportunity for students to interact with peers not in their classes in an "advisory" setting.

Students receive sufficient time to succeed, and reap rewards for positive performance. Close teacher-student relationships are evidenced by the teachers' knowing students by name and being aware of their strengths, needs, and interests. This information is used, along with comprehensive performance data, to ensure that students are challenged and supported. There are no prerequisites for challenging courses.

2. Core Academic Learning. Achievement is essential in rigorous programs accessible to all students in the subjects of English, mathematics, and science, and in other core subjects identified by the school.

Highly successful schools offer open access to strong core content in key subject areas. Such programs not only provide rigorous content but also rich opportunities for reflection as well as opportunities for students to apply learning experiences to the real world. A key feature in highly successful schools is the degree to which rigorous and relevant learning experiences are accessible to students historically excluded from such opportunities. Although all schools studied provided their students with rich opportunities, several had succeeded in significantly reducing the number of levels, barriers to participation, and/or opportunities for students to navigate an easier course through the school's program.

Douglas S. Freeman High School offers a strong and varied program of studies, including standard core courses, honors courses, Advanced Placement options, and a growing number of dual-enrollment opportunities. Several strategies are in place to help new students succeed, including a longer lunch with a study block of 22 minutes per day, when students are encouraged to seek additional academic support. Although voluntary in most cases, structure is added to this time block for students identified as needing additional help. Students identified as likely to experience transitional problems are encouraged to take a WebQuest-based study skills program taught during the study block of the lunch/study period. Students at this school, like all those in Henrico County, receive laptop computers to assist in their learning. This technology provides a significant opportunity for all students to extend their learning.

On average, at *George Wythe High School*, 65 percent of students graduate with at least six college credits. The array of course options and learning experiences available to George Wythe students belies the size of the school. The school focuses attention on strong core courses with minimal variation within those courses. School mathematics requirements ensure that all students graduate with at least Algebra I and Geometry credits. More than half of George Wythe students (52 percent) graduate with three or more years of a foreign language.

James River High School maintains high levels of achievement by updating practices and procedures to meet the rapidly changing demographics of the student body. Several programs are designed to support students, including a student mentoring program and Triple Prep. The latter program targets the *Standards of Learning* remediation needs of students and also supports Advanced Placement students and stretch learning

Students identified as likely to experience transitional problems are encouraged to take a WebQuest-based study skills program taught during the study block of the lunch/study period.

opportunities. Teachers and administrative team members expect all students to do well. They communicate these expectations, as well as the availability of support, to help students achieve. As a result, there is a deep-seated belief that everyone at the school is heavily invested in and involved with securing success for all students.

Even among the top-rated schools in the study group, *Princess Anne High School* is an unusual school because it includes many courses in its core program that are usually available only to a small percentage of the student body. The Kuder Interest Inventory and the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) are administered to all students. The results of the Kuder are used to develop an individualized plan for each Princess Anne student. The PSAT is used to screen for future programming options and to assist staff in the development of meaningful support programs for individual students. Support is built into the school day through an intensified block schedule, which allows at-risk students in challenging courses to receive additional help. The value of such support options is reflected in the willingness of students to elect challenging coursework, knowing that there are safety nets in place to ensure their success.

Smithfield High School students respond successfully to the culture of high expectations. Gains on the *Standards of Learning* assessment pass rates by Smithfield students in the past three years have totaled 15 percent or more. The staff indicated that the use of common assessments within the two county high schools has had a significant impact on instruction and the achievement levels of students. All Smithfield teachers have posted tutorial hours, and special tutoring sessions are available to students enrolled in the school's Advanced Placement program.

West Point High School offers an unusually high number of course offerings for a school with only 260 students. Attention is focused on strong core courses with minimal variations within these offerings. The school schedule allows students to take a variety of strong core and elective courses. For example, more than 75 percent of West Point students schedule three or more years of a world language. To aid in students' success in this challenging environment of high expectations, the staff developed an eighth-period support program. Students identified as performing in the lower quartile the previous year (based on a composite of performance data) are scheduled for additional support during eighth period until such time as they no longer require it. Additionally, as a result of nine-week assessments, regular classroom assessments, and observations, students may be scheduled for this support period at any time during the year.

3. Stretch Learning. Rigorous and relevant learning beyond minimum requirements (participation and achievement in higher-level courses, specialized courses) exists and is accessible to all students.

In addition to providing students with access to strong core programs, the schools in this study offer additional opportunities for students to explore areas of new and/or deeper learning. These opportunities differ substantially from school to school. While some schools have rich

The PSAT is used to screen for future programming options and to assist staff in the development of meaningful support programs for individual students.

options such as dual-enrollment, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate programs, others have equally robust opportunities in areas of visual and performing arts, career and technical education, and/or co-curricular and extracurricular programs. Without exception, students cited access to these programs, encouragement to attempt them, and support to ensure success as key factors in their high levels of engagement.

Chatham High School offers a variety of rigorous and relevant stretch learning opportunities. One is Project Lead The Way, a national engineering and technology program designed to attract and keep students in related professional fields. Another is Virginia's Teachers for Tomorrow, designed to attract students to the field of education through exposure to a world-class curriculum and hands-on experience that focuses on teaching. Another strong program, the Piedmont Governor's School, is a mathematics and science opportunity for motivated secondary students. Additionally, students who complete the Chatham community service requirement receive the *Graduate of Merit* seal, a local diploma option. These highly effective and popular programs provide students with both rigorous and relevant experiences in areas of interest that also meet the needs of the local communities.

Douglas S. Freeman High School offers various opportunities for rigorous and relevant stretch learning. The school houses the Center for Leadership, Government, and Global Studies, a magnet program for Henrico County students. This program provides a rigorous academic curriculum that prepares its graduates to act as principle-centered leader/servers in their communities. Through an advanced study of the social sciences, students are exposed to the complexities of political, social, and economic life; they learn to analyze questions through multiple lenses; and they become increasingly aware of the ambiguities of modern life. The curriculum includes advanced coursework in the areas of leadership, economics, English, philosophy, history, and the social sciences. In addition, Douglas S. Freeman's performing arts program has been recognized with state and regional awards.

James River High School is a school where it is difficult for a student to fall through the cracks. Nearly 64 percent of the students at James River receive an Advanced Studies Diploma, and in just three years, the number of students taking Advanced Placement tests has doubled. A unique cadre of 10 to 12 teachers, administrators, and counselors make up an Office of Academic Success for Diverse Students. The group holds monthly meetings to consider issues such as teacher awareness; policy, procedures, and practices; data, testing, and grades; diversity training; and the disparity of achievement in academic levels. Another important component of James River is the Leadership Academy, a district-wide magnet program that offers a demanding mix of challenging coursework and technical leadership opportunities designed to help students function as present and future leaders.

Princess Anne High School offers extensive and varied learning opportunities. They range from the school's International Baccalaureate program and Advanced Placement opportunities to its highly regarded

Through an advanced study of the social sciences, students are exposed to the complexities of political, social, and economic life; they learn to analyze questions through multiple lenses; and they become increasingly aware of the ambiguities of modern life.

Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program. All students are encouraged to schedule at least one Advanced Placement offering. The number of Princess Anne students taking Advanced Placement courses has continued to climb, with an increase of 21 percent over the past five years. In the International Baccalaureate program, 96 percent of students have earned the special diploma, exceeding the world average by at least 13 percent during the past five years. The improvement in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate participation exceeds city, state, and national averages, and student scores exceed the city, state, and national averages. The feeder middle school also offers a special program that allows students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to participate successfully in the International Baccalaureate program or other advanced programs of their choice.

Randolph-Henry High School offers additional academic opportunities including online classes such as Chinese and Latin, dual-enrollment programs, and the Governor's School of Southside Virginia. The innovative Statesman Computer Program offers experiences in computer technology and engineering. Students in these classes have the opportunity to gain industry certification while learning how to build, service, and sell state-of-the-art computers. In addition, the Land Laboratory program provides learning experiences in farming and raising and selling cattle and horses, along with an extensive aquaculture project in which students raise and sell fish to the community. These highly effective and popular programs provide students with both rigorous and relevant experiences related to their interests and community needs.

West Point High School students average 30 credits by graduation, an average of six to eight credits more than the state requirement. The students who access dual-enrollment options earn an average of 20 college degree credits prior to graduation (over a three-year average). The school offers 60 college credits through in-class and online Advanced Placement courses. As one staff member remarked, "This is an issue of wanting [rigorous learning experiences] and not accepting less than what students are capable of doing."

4. Student Engagement. The extent to which students a) are motivated and committed to learning, b) have a sense of belonging and accomplishment, and c) have relationships with adults, peers, and parents that support learning.

A growing body of research highlights the connection between student engagement and student achievement. There is little doubt that the quality of relationships within a school is an integral part of the establishment of a culture of high expectations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the schools cited as exemplars have intentional initiatives to influence these positive relationships.

Chatham High School has an unusually high level of students (80 percent) participating in at least one club and/or extracurricular program. Classroom instruction is focused around student interests, generating active participation. Teachers make concerted efforts to connect

The Land Laboratory program provides learning experiences in farming and raising and selling cattle and horses, along with an extensive aquaculture project in which students raise and sell fish to the community.

instruction to the lives of students. Chatham's small size facilitates the positive relationships that characterize the school. Students reported that teachers know them by name and take a personal interest in ensuring that they are doing well. Students reported that it is very difficult to fall through the cracks.

George Wythe High School represents an outstanding example of student engagement. The relationships between students and adults are mutually respectful and supportive. The same is true for the relationships between students, as well as between staff members. Interviews with staff members reveal that they accept and develop a variety of roles in their relationships with students. Many indicated that these roles extend into their lives within the George Wythe community where both staff members and parents have accepted responsibilities for all students. Teachers regularly reported that their work is not confined to the classroom, but extends to the halls, the community, and after-school activities.

The relationships between students and adults are mutually respectful and supportive. The same is true for the relationships between students, as well as between staff members.

James River High School offers many programs that promote sustained student relationships with adults. Faculty and students emphasized that a critical question is posed to incoming students: "What do you need to be successful?" Although academic rigor and challenge is important at the school, there is also a great deal of emphasis on other areas of the curriculum outside of core academic subjects assessed on the *Standards of Learning*. These areas are important ways to engage students and are highly respected by everyone in the school. The culinary arts program, for example, attracts a strong group of students and is a way for those students to express their passion and creativity in a less traditional learning environment. This program represents an excellent example of the openness of decision making, the openness of the faculty and administrative team to new ideas, the openness of the student body to change, and the high degree of trust that exists among each of the groups at James River.

Randolph-Henry High School reports that more than 60 percent of students participate in some form of additional programming. Administrators and staff take seriously the responsibility for ensuring positive student/adult relationships. In reviewing data that indicated a decline in engagement by incoming ninth graders, the staff developed the "Take 10" program, which ensures new students are welcomed and supported. Students are grouped in small "family" settings and have meaningful contact with a small number of staff members who are deeply committed to meeting the needs of this age group.

Smithfield High School has a helpful staff and caring climate. Both are contributing factors in students' ability to succeed. As a part of the Smithfield career-and-college-planning focus, the staff has erected a bulletin board on which the college acceptances for students are listed. Freshmen and sophomore groups indicated that they regularly look at the board and have been inspired by the acceptance notices to reach for more aggressive goals for themselves. The bulletin board represents one of numerous intentional aspects of a school culture designed to encourage and engage students.

Turner Ashby High School has a great deal of stability. Many of the teachers grew up in the area and are heavily invested in the success of their students. Similarly, many of the students have been together since grade school so they know each other very well. Turner Ashby has the highest attendance rate in the district (nearly 95 percent). The community is fully supportive of the school's programs. Many of the school clubs include a community outreach element in the form of either formal or informal community service. The Ruriteen Club, one of the largest chapters in the country, sets a good example through its many civic activities, as does the active Future Farmers of America chapter.

West Point High School represents an outstanding example of student engagement. The relationships between and among students and adults are mutually respectful, supportive, and deep. Many staff members indicated that these educator roles extend to their lives within the West Point community, where they and parents have accepted responsibility for all students. Teachers regularly reported that their work is not confined to the classroom, but extends to the community and after-school activities. This commitment has resulted in classes with high levels of student engagement and participation.

5. Personal Skill Development. The extent to which the school a) provides measures of personal, social, service, and leadership skills, and b) encourages demonstrations of positive behaviors and attitudes.

The schools provide extensive opportunities for students to explore skills that extend beyond areas of academics. Students have options to develop their personal skills in areas of leadership, organization, community service, etc. Many teachers in these schools see their role as extending beyond the classroom, and their participation in co-curricular and extracurricular activities provides positive role models for their students.

Centreville High School offers its students a one-credit Leadership Training Class that focuses on personal organizational skills, time management, and public speaking. Students gain experience in organizing large activities such as class and school elections, homecoming, and other school events. Students may also elect to take peer mediation, a course in which they develop interpersonal support and leadership skills enabling them to serve as peer mediators and assist in dispute resolution. Additionally, many students participate in community service activities. The majority of these are organized through their clubs and classes.

Douglas S. Freeman High School has extensive co-curricular and extracurricular programming. These programs enjoy a rich tradition in the community and offer opportunities for students to gain experience in key areas of personal growth. More than 60 percent of Freeman students participate in such programs. In addition to the school's highly regarded athletic teams, Freeman students can select from activities in areas of academic competition, fine and performing arts, curricular and special interest clubs, a variety of honor societies, and service organizations. In their interviews, students stressed the importance of these activities to the maintenance of the "Freeman Family" environment.

Students may also elect to take a course in Peer Mediation, where they develop interpersonal support and leadership skills enabling them to serve as peer mediators and assist in dispute resolution.

George Wythe High School provides a wide variety of independent and self-directed learning options. These include extensive dual-enrollment programs and an extremely flexible approach to meeting the needs of students via scheduling modifications and independent study. More than 50 percent of George Wythe students have participated in at least one club in each of the past three years. Additionally, George Wythe student organizations, which are connected to school courses such as Future Farmers of America, Future Business Leaders of America, and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, are exceptional examples both of personal skill development programs as well as high student engagement.

Randolph-Henry High School leaders have paid careful attention to issues of personal skill development by devoting a significant part of the school's transitional programming to the topics of integrity, perseverance, hard work, and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, in the "Take 10" program, time is provided on a daily basis for discussions of key personal skills. Additionally, the school offers a wide array of clubs and extracurricular programs that provide extensive opportunities for leadership experiences and the development of personal strengths and interests.

Princess Anne High School works hard to integrate leadership, character development, and the promotion of good behavior into all school programs and activities. For example, the guidance department conducts three eight-week programs throughout the year that emphasize leadership, time management, and organizational skills. In 2006, 158 student delegates and 16 staff members participated in the Virginia Beach Leadership workshop. Approximately 18 percent of the student body holds at least one leadership role in clubs and/or athletics, and the majority of clubs include community service components. The school also promotes personal skill development through the Cavaliers @ Princess Anne Behavior Campaign, a program that recognizes good behavior (politeness, courtesy, and school pride), and the ABCs of Diversity @ Princess Anne, a program designed to promote tolerance, acceptance, motivation, and education around the issue of diversity.

The guidance department conducts three eight-week programs throughout the year that emphasize leadership, time management, and organizational skills.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction. Teach students through experiences that are challenging, stimulate reflective thought, and are real world relevant through applications of skills and knowledge.

Centreville High School has made quality instruction in all areas non-negotiable. A strong belief exists that quality instructional experiences begin with the employment of high-quality teachers. The school has identified the colleges that are attended by its graduates and makes a concerted effort, through recruitment trips, to bring graduates from those schools into the system. All teachers intentionally extend lessons in core classes to connect to contemporary issues. High levels of learning (i.e., application and evaluation) appear in daily lessons across the disciplines. Students were comfortable working at these levels of instruction and participated actively in the discussions and explorations.

Chatham High School has many exemplary programs that provide rigorous and relevant instruction, including programs in career and

technical education, Project Lead The Way, and programs in visual and performing arts. To increase the quality of learning across disciplines, support in reading is offered to all students. Additionally, school leaders have created a disciplined school environment as a bridge to high expectations in instructional outcomes. These high behavioral expectations have been transferred to high expectations for classroom instruction. Teachers indicate that they accept no excuses. Students are encouraged to perform at the level of the school's expectations and are supported in their efforts to do so.

The school leadership team at **Douglas S. Freeman High School** spends considerable effort to find, induct, and maintain quality instructional staff. The commitment to teacher excellence is reflected in the quality of instruction that students experience. The availability of laptop computers for all students has enabled the creation of lessons rich in technology. Teachers and students regularly and seamlessly use technology in the teaching/learning process.

Princess Anne High School has developed pacing guides for courses with *Standards of Learning* assessments. Both the International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement programs have well-developed comprehensive curricula for all courses. To support rigorous learning, significant professional development around teaching in a block schedule has taken place. Lesson plans suggest that teachers vary activities every 20 to 30 minutes within the block and use teaching time effectively. Extensive effort is applied toward stronger application and relevance in the daily lessons. Additional support is provided by the school's strong focus on literacy across disciplines. All staff members have been trained on reading in content areas. There has also been a focus on differentiating instruction. Teachers are intentional about collegial collaboration aimed at increasing cross-curricular integration of courses.

Smithfield High School's administrative team and staff recognize the importance of their work in the classrooms. A schoolwide commitment to replace "hobby" teaching (teaching areas of interest or favorite lessons regardless of correlation to student and/or program needs) with carefully structured and sequenced courses was a critical step toward ensuring that all students could be successful in rigorous classes. Curriculum is further supported by a team of lead teachers, who provide substantial levels of support for classroom teachers by using data to inform and improve instruction and offering sound instructional strategies. These teachers are viewed as valuable assets by staff and administrators. It is also clear that instructional time is highly valued. Interruptions are minimized, and teachers reported that administrative support allows them to focus their attention on instruction.

Curriculum is further supported by a team of Lead Teachers, who provide substantial levels of support for classroom teachers by using data to inform and improve instruction and offering sound instructional strategies.

Turner Ashby High School focuses on high-quality instruction. Its program of studies is rich and varied, with staff making a concerted effort to provide experiences that match the expressed needs of students. Turner Ashby offers students opportunities well beyond the minimum requirements for Virginia diplomas. Students may schedule courses within the school, at the county's technical center, in a variety of alternative

settings, and in dual-enrollment and Advanced Placement programs utilizing a variety of distance learning options. Although located in a rural area, Turner Ashby graduates 49 percent of its students with an Advanced Studies Diploma. This statistic reflects the school's commitment to rigorous instruction for students.

West Point High School administrators spend considerable effort to find, induct, and maintain quality instructional staff. The staff represents a blend of highly experienced, long-time teachers from West Point and highly effective younger staff. Classes present strong connections between the content of the lesson and real-world experiences. No courses have prerequisite requirements, and students are encouraged to attempt high-level courses and learning experiences. Expectations remain the same for all students. Students requiring additional support in their quest for success are accommodated in the school's eighth-period intervention/support block and through additional support provided by teachers. This approach ensures rigor and high instructional quality without preventing less able students from experiencing success in the challenging environment.

7. Data-Driven Decisions. Data are used to provide a clear, unwavering focus on curriculum priorities that are both rigorous and relevant, instruction that is personalized, and school improvement that is continuous.

The Commonwealth's standards and assessment program provides schools with a substantial amount of useful data about student performance. School division central offices have also provided considerable support for schools, both in the analysis of performance data and in training staff in the use of such data. The model schools have each made intentional and positive use of this information.

Douglas S. Freeman High School has achieved award-winning status by paying careful attention to data. All school reports reflect the connection between state and local standards and the results of assessments. School leaders and teachers use common planning opportunities to focus on alignment issues. Faculty regularly review data and participate in decisions pertaining to the adjustment of curricular offerings to ensure that the school continues to reach and exceed stated benchmarks. School leaders have made data analysis a part of the culture of the school. Administrators and teachers regularly collect and analyze data from a variety of sources. Advancement toward school goals is benchmarked using challenging standards. Progress is charted and is an integral part of the discussions within the school community.

James River High School uses both summative and formative assessments to determine the progress of individual students, teacher performance, and program effectiveness. The county has provided an assessment support specialist to assist schools in the assessment and analysis. In addition to the formal assessments conducted by the state, the results of Advanced Placement examinations and the SAT, as well as locally developed assessments, the staff makes extensive use of surveys and informal focus

Students requiring additional support in their quest for success are accommodated in the school's eighth-period intervention/support block and through additional support provided by teachers.

27

groups meetings. The principal conducts monthly "Coffee and Cookies" meetings, during which all staff members are invited to share their perspectives on current and planned programs. A similar program is conducted with equal frequency for students and parents.

Princess Anne High School is an excellent example of the incorporation of data into the school's culture. For the past decade, Princess Anne has used data to set goals for improvement. The School Planning Council, which includes stakeholder groups (parents, staff, and students), reviews student data in a variety of forms throughout the year. The PSAT is administered to the entire school population so that results can be used diagnostically to identify schoolwide needs. Finally, each year, during the five pre-service days before the opening of school, faculty and administrators conduct a comprehensive analysis of student performance data in all areas. Using a specific process, the school develops goals and benchmarks for the coming year. Teachers then develop objectives and action plans to improve classroom instruction and student performance. Progress is monitored every nine weeks, allowing faculty and students to receive constant feedback.

Smithfield High School represents one of the best examples of data use in informing decisions. Formative, summative, and longitudinal information is collected and analyzed. School leaders and a leadership team regularly use data to examine previously held assumptions. The school utilizes a technology-based reporting system, ReportsOnlineSystem (ROS), which provides detailed information about locally administered assessments. Such reports include data regarding student and class performance, item analysis, and correlations with Virginia's *Standards of Learning*. Additionally, the administrative team makes use of data collected in both formal and informal settings, including meetings with members of the staff, departments, and the school's Leadership Council. Information from these sources is used to define needs, to discuss and analyze options, and to evaluate progress in implemented programs.

Turner Ashby High School teachers reported that there is a regular process of self-evaluation completed on a department and individual basis. The annual revision of data-driven improvement targets is considered the norm rather than the exception. Turner Ashby staff members make extensive use of an assessment-authoring tool to create periodic formative assessments. These assessments are designed to identify areas of strength and weakness in students. Student information is then made available to parents through an electronic parent-information system.

West Point High School conducts a two-week summer planning session, where teachers review data sets for all students. Data include detailed performance reports that accompany the *Standards of Learning*, results from the standardized tests administered to all students, grades in all classes from the previous year, teacher notes, and any additional pertinent information. Students are placed on a scale according to the data, and any students falling into the lower quartile in any content area are scheduled to begin the year in the eighth-period intervention/support program. Additionally, assessments are administered in all areas every nine weeks

Turner Ashby staff members make extensive use of an assessment-authoring tool to create periodic formative assessments. These assessments are designed to identify areas of strength and weakness in students.

throughout the school year. Performance on these assessments, as well as student performance on more frequent classroom-administered assessments, is used to move students in and out of the eighth-period program. This extensive use of data is a key factor in the success of the school's "no failure" approach to its high expectations for students.

8. Transitions. The school recognizes the impact of various transitions on student engagement and performance and has programs that address these needs.

Throughout the country, there is growing realization that ninth grade may be the last chance for many students to stay on the path to graduation. There is also a growing awareness of how stressful it is to transition into a new school environment. In some instances, the schools exist in communities where the demographics of the area and the nature of the community mitigate the stress of moving to a new building with new demands and expectations. Several schools, however, have developed intentional programs designed to compensate for size and continuity issues.

Centreville High School is currently implementing a Freshman Academy. School leaders and staff have planned small classes; shared core teachers; and emphasized reading, common rubrics, and performance-based assessments to support the needs of incoming ninth-graders. The overall school culture aids in abating transitional anxiety because the school is divided into four sub-schools. Students are grouped alphabetically and remain with their sub-school throughout their stay in Centreville. This structure promotes a caring, supportive atmosphere. Students regularly used the word *trust* to describe the relationship between students and teachers. This environment represents one of the major components of the school's success.

James River High School staff has spent considerable time exploring the means to increase the success rate of incoming freshmen. The staff determined that a student-to-student mentoring program would have the best chance of increasing freshmen success levels and the amount of student-to-student interaction. The mentoring program has two important components. First, upper-class students identified as candidates who would benefit from the training and mentoring experiences were selected as mentors. The mentors meet formally with their freshmen regularly at the beginning of the year and then each month thereafter for structured sessions. Another key component of the transitional support system is the supportive atmosphere that pervades the building.

Smithfield High School is physically adjacent to the local middle school, providing eighth-grade students with numerous opportunities to see and become acquainted with the high school, eliminating much of the transition anxiety. In addition, the concept of a small learning community (SLC) provides additional support for incoming students. The SLC is a research-based project that allows ninth-grade students to achieve success through a cohesive transition to high school. Freshmen attend their core academic classes within the SLC, a highly collaborative setting in which

The staff determined that a student-to-student mentoring program would have the best chance of increasing freshmen success levels and the amount of student-to-student interaction.

teachers meet regularly regarding lesson planning, student performance, attendance, and discipline, and overall program goals. There is also an intentional career and college planning process for students preparing to graduate.

Turner Ashby High School combats issues caused by transition anxiety with CORE, a program designed for at-risk students who are not eligible for other available support services. Identified freshmen are scheduled for CORE 1, which provides intensive support in the form of tutoring, study skills instruction, planning strategies, and limited student choice regarding classes and time use. CORE 2 programming is available for students in their sophomore year and provides CORE 1 students with support but with reduced structure as students demonstrate the ability to deal effectively with greater levels of independence. Another important element that eases new students into the school is the caring culture of the school. Students regularly used the words *family* and *community* to describe the relationship between students and teachers.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach. There are opportunities for all members of the school to demonstrate collaborative leadership. The school has a clear sense of purpose with leadership support for a culture of high expectations for all students.

Virtually all major research studies examining the characteristics of highly effective schools cite the influence of leadership in the development of high-quality schools. The 10 schools in this study reflect and support this conclusion. Although leadership styles vary considerably from school to school, there is clear evidence in each school of the relationship between leadership and school success. All of the schools had excellent leadership as reflected in the case studies. In several of the schools, recent changes in demographics and/or a desire for change provide excellent examples of intentional leadership behaviors and their impact on the accomplishments of the school.

Princess Anne High School's principal provides clear, consistent, and visionary leadership. This is a principal-led school, not a principal-dominated school. The principal holds regular meetings with staff and students to encourage student ownership and participation. Every educator understands that he or she is a leader, and extended leadership opportunities are available every time a new challenge is presented. Teachers believe in mutual support in a collegial atmosphere.

Smithfield High School enables staff members to make decisions by expanding their roles as leaders and allowing opportunities for their active participation in school development. The use and development of the lead teacher concept provides an excellent example of this commitment. Teachers felt valued for their contributions. They described how they enjoyed coming to work and felt that students recognized this positive outlook. There is a high level of accountability, and the principal is clear about her expectations.

Centreville High School administrators understand that the continuation

The principal holds regular meetings with staff and students to encourage student ownership and participation. Every educator understands that he or she is a leader, and extended leadership opportunities are available every time a new challenge is presented.

of the school's success is directly related to the individual successes of its students and staff. The principal has worked with the staff to identify areas of strength, recognized the importance of their contributions, and helped to target new areas for improvement. The principal uses collaborative approaches to problem solving and has an unfailing commitment to high standards. In addition, an elective course in leadership has been developed to provide students with hands-on learning experiences designed to enhance their comfort and skills in leadership roles. Additionally, there is a focus on staff professionalism and a welcoming of their involvement in decisions affecting them and the school's students.

Chatham High School has been recreated as a result of the principal's vision and enthusiasm, as well as the commitment to high expectations that pervades the school. The outcomes associated with the *Standards of Learning* assessments have been used to help students recognize the relationship between hard work and high achievement. A Behavior Modification Center was also established, helping to create an environment in which learning can take place through implementation of a clear code of conduct, with rewards and consequences. Finally, expectations are published and enforced, and parents are involved in both discipline and academic issues.

The outcomes associated with the Standards of Learning assessments have been used to help students recognize the relationship between hard work and high achievement.

James River High School's principal has taken a number of steps to turn the school into an example of excellence, including the establishment of a clear set of behavioral expectations for students and staff, strict adherence to a student-centered philosophy, and creation of numerous forums for discussion and decision making. Teachers indicated that the principal always responds positively to suggestions and/or expressions of concern. Professional behavior is expected and facilitated. There is an extensive program for student leadership. Student government is an active concept, and the club organization has contributed significantly to the spirit of community.

10. Professional Learning Community. The school focuses on establishing professional learning communities that allow staff to collaborate and have joint planning time to analyze curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student performance.

A strong correlation exists between the commitment of adults to learning and the level of student achievement. All schools in the study have developed various systems to encourage and support professional growth. There is a clear connection in each school between the needs of the students and the commitment of the staff to explore ways in which they might address those needs.

Centreville High School engaged in a "build-a-school" project to coordinate the visions of community stakeholders about the future of the school and its mission. Key vision elements were labeled as "bricks" in the new school and incorporated into a large visual so that participants could view the confluence of their individual visions. During the past four years, the school has devoted much time and resources to the continued development of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) concept.

Furthermore, the school's PLC provides a research-based vehicle for continuous discussion, modeling, and evaluation of best instructional practices. The school provides shared folder access on its computer system so that department members may post and share lessons, assessments, and projects.

Smithfield High School carefully recruits, selects, and inducts new teachers at Smithfield as part of a reflective, intentional process. This process supports the goal of high expectations, professional responsibility, and a caring, supportive environment. These expectations include the commitment to quality instruction as well as the commitment to devote time to support the success of the school. At Smithfield, professional learning activities are defined by data. After data are analyzed, school leaders and teachers identify areas in which additional professional training and/or exploration will enhance the prospects of improving the target areas. Professional learning opportunities are then planned accordingly. Without exception, teachers cited the ways in which they feel valued, appreciated, and respected as professionals by the school's administrators and by members of the community.

Princess Anne High School offers purposeful professional development that is aligned to school-improvement priorities. There are high expectations for the staff, and significant opportunities are available for professional development to help meet those expectations. Teachers have created common assessments and share notes, plans, and effective practices. Cross-discipline (content area) observations of colleagues are mandatory and are viewed as an integral part of professional development. Staff members have been encouraged to establish their own professional learning communities based on self-identified needs. The work in these learning groups has contributed to making the school more challenging and responsive to 21st century needs. In addition, faculty members are expected to present information from workshops and conferences they attend so that the entire school can benefit.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners. The school has schoolwide and classroom strategies and interventions to meet the needs of struggling learners, including students with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), minority students, low-income/poverty students, and at-risk students.

Successful schools understand the critical relationship between the creation of an atmosphere of high expectations (whether academic or social) and the levels of support provided for students. In the schools studied for this report, while the nature of the support programs varied considerably, there was an unmistakable commitment to provide students with a variety of readily available means for accessing help. Students regularly cited the commitment of teachers to their success.

Centreville High School has a number of options available for struggling students. The school's PLUS (Practice, Learn, Understand, Study) Period provides a structured time for students to receive help from content specialists in their area of difficulty. Programs to support second language

Programs to support second language learners, which make up approximately 40 percent of the school's minority population, are highly developed and effective.

learners, which make up approximately 40 percent of the school's minority population, are highly developed and effective. Also, in order to encourage greater participation in the school's extensive Advanced Placement offerings, Centreville provides a summer orientation program for students. As with all schools that focus on rigorous and relevant instruction, helping students achieve at the expected levels without lowering standards is critical. The environment of caring relationships that exists at Centreville has created a climate in which students accept the support as an extension of a helping hand from adults they trust.

James River High School exhibits an aggressive approach to the concept of "student centered." Orientation programs for incoming students are based on having students answer the question, "What would you need to be successful?" The school responds to these issues, and the students respond positively to the school's concern for them. There are a variety of support programs at this school. One is Triple Prep, which offers support for students needing remedial, Advanced Placement, and other types of academic assistance. Another program is the Student/Peer Mentor Program, which has upper-class students serving as mentors to freshmen. The culture of caring relationships that characterizes James River creates a climate in which support for struggling students is a seamless part of the school's programming.

Princess Anne High School has rich support programs to ensure the success of its students. Mentoring options are available for both incoming (transition) students and for students who will benefit from additional peer support. *Standards of Learning* preparation courses provide intensive preparation experiences designed to help students succeed on the state assessments and, additionally, to be prepared for more challenging course work. There is also a voluntary fourth block of the school day to schedule support options. To assist struggling readers, Princess Anne has implemented a nationally recognized reading support program. To further support struggling students, the school employs a full-time reading specialist.

Randolph-Henry High School offers a variety of support options for its students. The newly implemented freshman summer academy proactively seeks to provide assistance to students before they require extensive services. However, the primary source of support for students is a committed teaching staff. The school's administrative team sets high expectations around the issue of student support.

There is also a voluntary fourth block of the school day to schedule support options. To assist struggling readers, Princess Anne has implemented a nationally recognized reading support program. To further support struggling students, the school employs a full-time reading specialist.

Appendix A

Rubric for 10 Key Components
Fundamental to School Improvement

High School: _____

Rubric for 10 Key Components Fundamental to School Improvement

1. Culture of High Expectations and Support. Create a culture that embraces the belief that all students can benefit from a rigorous and relevant curriculum and provides personalized relationships between adults and students to support high levels of achievement.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey
- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- Student Focus Group Interviews
- School Observation
- Classroom Observation
- Student Work Analysis
- School Improvement Plan and Reports
- School Practices Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. References to high student expectations appear in vision and mission statements of the school.					
2. The belief is reflected in student and teacher handbooks.					
3. The belief is pervasive among school personnel, with no apparent dissenters.					
4. The belief is evident in conversations with students.					
5. Students have a clear and ambitious picture of what they will do in the future.					
6. Students know and understand the meaning of high-quality work.					
7. The need for high expectations is communicated to parents and community in newsletters, reports, and school policies; at school events and parent conferences; and on the school's Web site.					
8. Student achievement is recognized and celebrated frequently.					
9. The school's emphasis on learning is reflected in the displays, posted materials, and awards within the building.					
10. The school is designed to promote sustained student relationships with adults.					
11. The schedule is designed to promote sustained student relationships with adults.					
12. Every student has an adult advocate and a personal plan for progress.					
13. Staff members are dedicated to helping all students meet state and local standards.					
14. Students perceive staff as caring and concerned with their educational achievement.					
Comments:					

2. Data-Driven Decisions. Use data to provide a clear, unwavering focus on curriculum priorities that are both rigorous and relevant, instruction that is personalized, and school improvement that is continuous.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Classroom Observation
- Curriculum Review

- Student Performance Data
- School Improvement Plan and Reports
- Available Data Sources
- School Practices Analysis

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. There are measurable goals tied to the school vision.					
2. The staff has identified a few important priorities that serve as a common focus throughout the school.					
3. The school's program of work is aligned to the vision.					
4. There is a willingness to explore ways to use data to measure progress.					
5. The school collects data to determine the amount of high rigor/high relevance instruction.					
6. The school has data on student performance related to students' goals.					
7. Data are used to highlight gaps that exist between student performance and real-world expectations.					
8. The school examines data for all nine subgroups to measure success of all students.					
9. Student achievement data are used to plan staff development.					
10. Student achievement data are used to reward teacher and staff performance.					
11. The school assessment program is based on district and state standards.					
12. The school uses data to align curriculum both vertically across grades and horizontally across subjects.					
13. Assessment data are provided to parents and students in a form they understand and to teachers in a format that can be used to make informed instructional decisions.					
14. The school regularly reviews data to develop school-improvement plans and to monitor progress.					
15. The school looks for trends in data over time.					
16. The school collects and uses follow-up data on student satisfaction and success beyond school.					
17. The school uses multiple indicators, including student work, to analyze student performance, not just one set of test scores.					
18. The school prepares regular reports that celebrate student and faculty achievements and communicate school goals.					
19. Student literacy levels are measured continuously and these data are compared to literacy achievement goals.					
Comments:					

3. Accountability. Set high expectations that are monitored, and then hold both students and adults accountable for students' continuous improvement in the curriculum priorities.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- Student Focus Group Interviews
- Classroom Observation
- Curriculum Review

- Student Work Analysis
- Student Assessment Analysis
- Student Performance Data
- School Improvement Plan and Reports
- Available Data Sources
- School Practices Analysis

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. No excuses are accepted for students not being successful. Unmet expectations are seen as a problem that can and must be corrected.					
2. Additional time, resources, and other interventions are available to students not meeting expectations.					
3. All students, regardless of ability, have opportunities identified in the curriculum to engage in higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving tasks.					
4. The school uses a variety of rubrics as often as applicable so that students know what quality work looks like.					
5. Student progress is monitored frequently with formal and informal assessments.					
6. Student progress reports are regularly shared with students and parents.					
7. Faculty members meet regularly to discuss the progress of individual students.					
8. Students and parents agree to academic expectations.					
9. Advisement/mentoring programs are available to all students and help identify students who are at risk of not meeting expectations.					
10. All students are regularly encouraged to do their best work and to "go the extra mile." Extra effort is encouraged and rewarded.					
11. Literacy is an important priority throughout the school.					
12. Pre-testing in classrooms is used often to ensure that students are consistently challenged but not overwhelmed.					
13. There is evidence of increased enrollments in stretch courses such as AP/IB and higher rates of student achievement.					
14. Academic intervention services are available immediately when a student does not meet expectations rather than waiting until next year.					
15. Administrator evaluations are based on student achievement.					
16. Teacher evaluations are based on student achievement.					
Comments:					

4. Articulated Curriculum. Use a framework to organize curriculum that drives instruction toward both rigor and relevance and leads to a continuum of instruction between grades and across disciplines.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Classroom Observation
- Curriculum Review
- Student Work Analysis

- Student Assessment Analysis
- Student Performance Data
- School Practices Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. A process is in place to design and update curriculum based on analyses of state standards, assessments, and local priorities.					
2. There is agreement among teachers about the academic skills and knowledge to be taught.					
3. Common rubrics have been designed and are used across disciplines in such areas as writing, research projects, demonstrations, problem solving, and decision making.					
4. Teachers regularly collaborate and design interdisciplinary lessons and projects linked to high-priority standards.					
5. There is evidence that all teachers, regardless of subject area, take responsibility for delivering high-priority academic skills and knowledge.					
6. Literacy development is addressed in all disciplines.					
7. Instruction is aligned with curriculum and state and local assessments.					
8. Curriculum topics are sequenced. There is a schoolwide delivery plan.					
9. Faculty work together to create learning experiences that are challenging, allowing students to think independently and extend their knowledge.					
10. Learning experiences relate to problems or situations connected to the world beyond school.					
11. Learning experiences allow students to become actively engaged in tasks that lead directly to learning objectives.					
12. Faculty receive reading levels of students and review the reading levels reflected in their textbooks.					
13. Faculty share techniques/strategies that successfully differentiate learning for students functioning at different literacy levels.					
14. Instruction demonstrates that textbooks are used to support learning rather than as a "cookbook."					
15. The process used by teachers to develop instructional plans is consistent across the school.					
Comments:					

5. Rigorous and Relevant Instruction. Teach students through experiences that are challenging, stimulate reflective thought, and are real-world applications of skills and knowledge.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey
- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- Student Focus Group Interviews
- School Observation
- Classroom Observation
- Curriculum Review
- Student Work Analysis
- Student Assessment Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. There is a strong focus on teaching the application of content knowledge to real-world situations through class and individual projects, hands-on activities, and various methods of communication.					
2. Faculty regularly review instructional practices and make modifications to make them more relevant.					
3. Students understand the purpose of instruction and how skills and knowledge can be applied.					
4. A good portion of student work is analytical—research papers, projects, demonstrations, experiments, extended writing.					
5. The curriculum focus is competence, not coverage.					
6. Faculty have time to engage in reflective thought and to collaborate and develop skills and plans to meet the needs of all students.					
7. Faculty work together in interdisciplinary teams to create learning experiences that focus on the application of knowledge in real-world settings.					
8. The school uses community resources to bring relevancy to the instructional programs.					
9. Students are typically asked to present their work to their peers.					
10. Faculty use strategies to connect learning to students' experiences and previous learning.					
11. Students work collaboratively in groups.					
12. Assessment practices are rich and include a variety of performance measures such as portfolios, projects, peer reviews, presentations.					
13. Teachers regularly demonstrate how to apply learning and use real-world examples.					
14. Internships and/or community service projects are a major focus of the instructional program.					
15. Community representatives are invited to participate as advisors, mentors, and reactors to student work.					
Comments:					

6. Personalized Learning. Create appropriate transitions into and from school, and multiple pathways to rigor and relevance based on a student's interests, learning style, aptitude, and needs.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey
- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- Student Focus Group Interviews
- School Observation

- Classroom Observation
- Curriculum Review
- Student Work Analysis
- School Practices Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. Teachers know their students very well (e.g., teachers attend after-school events, have lunch with students, make it a practice to call students' homes, and are involved with advisement/mentoring programs).					
2. Teachers are skilled in ways to differentiate instruction and regularly employ such practices.					
3. Special programs and structures are in place to ensure the successful transition of students into and out of high school.					
4. Applied academic programs have been developed based on student needs and interests.					
5. It is common practice, supported by the school schedule and structure, to vary amounts of instructional time and resources to accommodate differing student needs to achieve proficiency.					
6. Teachers use a variety of instructional approaches and strategies in the classroom.					
7. Surveys are used to learn about student interests.					
8. Students have choices and options regarding their learning.					
9. Pre-testing and other data are used as a tool to individualize instruction.					
10. The school is organized around the needs of students.					
11. Media centers and study labs are readily available to all students.					
12. Counseling services are readily available to all students.					
13. Technology is used effectively as a tool to differentiate instruction and as a resource for all students.					
14. Organized extracurricular organizations and athletics provide adequate opportunities for students to develop interests and abilities in addition to academic achievement.					
Comments:					

7. Professional Learning Communities. Foster development of a highly collaborative staff and provide sustained professional development focused on the improvement of instruction.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey

- School Improvement Plan and Reports
- School Practices Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. Teachers keep up with new ideas in their fields and employ innovative and effective instructional practices.					
2. Professional development is a significant schoolwide emphasis.					
3. Acquiring/developing a high-quality staff is considered the most important factor related to student achievement.					
4. Teachers have time, opportunities, and incentives to reflect critically and analytically on what they are teaching and not teaching, and why.					
5. Root causes of obstacles to student achievement have been identified and serve as topics for staff development.					
6. A comprehensive plan sets the priority for use of funds for instructional improvement, teacher evaluation, and professional development.					
7. The professional development program is aligned with the instructional improvement plan.					
8. The school has a process to share best practices of faculty throughout the school (e.g., study circles, peer reviews).					
9. Every teacher and administrator has an individual improvement plan.					
10. Resources and research are routinely collected, distributed, and discussed with staff.					
11. Professional development programs are routinely evaluated and modified accordingly.					
12. Faculty teamwork is a "way of life" in the school.					
13. The use of faculty time and resources reflects the school's emphasis on development of literacy skills and independent learners.					
14. The culture of the school includes celebration of both student and faculty achievement.					
15. Teachers meet to review the quality of learning experiences and offer suggestions for improvement.					
16. Available resources are discussed to determine the appropriate uses to meet the goals and mission of the school.					
17. Students take an active role in the professional learning community by sharing knowledge and teaching others.					
Comments:					

8. Partnerships. Obtain and leverage parent and community involvement resulting in positive relationships with schools.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey

- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- School Improvement Plan and Reports
- School Practices Analysis

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. School policy goes beyond "open door" to "open heart" in inviting parents and interested community members to play an active role in the education process.					
2. Parents and community members participate in school activities.					
3. The school actively seeks parents and community members to work in the school as volunteers or paraprofessionals.					
4. Faculty and administrators have the belief that educating students is more effective when parents understand and buy into the principles upon which the school operates.					
5. Conditions and personnel in the school are inviting and welcoming, which encourages and supports parental involvement.					
6. The school uses a variety of resources and strategies to help parents understand the standards, assessments, and academic achievement requirements for students.					
7. The school has taken steps to make the media center, athletic facilities, and other school facilities available to the community when possible.					
8. The school conducts satisfaction surveys with parents and community.					
9. The school actively seeks and involves parents on advisory committees for the purpose of school improvement.					
10. Many of the school's programs are supported by parent/community booster clubs.					
11. The school/district has established a nonprofit 501(c)(3) education foundation to support education goals.					
12. The school conducts focus groups regularly for parents and community members.					
13. Administrators and teachers are active in the community.					
14. The school tracks data on parent involvement and has specific goals to increase parent involvement and support.					
15. It is common for the principal, other administrators, and/or teachers to visit parents at home and community agencies.					
16. Teachers are encouraged to communicate regularly with parents in writing, by phone, and in person concerning student successes and needs.					
17. The school seeks ways to increase community participation in the life of the school (e.g., free admissions, coupons, senior discounts, volunteer opportunities).					
Comments:					

9. School Climate. Establish and maintain a safe and orderly school.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey
- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- Student Focus Group Interviews

- School Observation
- Classroom Observation
- School Practices Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. School staff fosters in students a sense of responsibility for appropriate behavior and creates an environment in which students can learn well.					
2. Students feel safe at the school.					
3. Faculty feel safe at the school.					
4. Discipline is handled in a fair, firm, and professional manner. There are appropriate interventions for disruptive students.					
5. The school tracks student behavior data and monitors incidents.					
6. The faculty accept responsibility for improving student behavior.					
7. The school has options for students to mediate conflicts.					
8. The school has a comprehensive character education program in place.					
9. Student, parent, and faculty handbooks are well organized and clearly spell out the expectations for student behavior and consequences for inappropriate behavior.					
10. Adults in the school are excellent role models for students and frequently find opportunities to demonstrate and explain positive character traits.					
11. Adults in the school make it a habit to talk with all students in a positive and reassuring way. Adults treat students with respect.					
12. School personnel have the habit of catching and rewarding good behavior rather than catching and punishing bad behavior.					
13. The general appearance of the school and grounds reflects a safe and orderly environment.					
14. The school has a welcoming attitude to visitors while maintaining the security of the building.					
15. All staff members, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, and office personnel, are seen as contributors to achieving the mission of the school.					
Comments:					

10. Leadership. Offer effective leadership development for administrators, teachers, parents, and community.

Prior to completing this portion of checklist, review and reflect on:

- Administrator Interview
- Staff Interviews
- Teacher Survey
- Parent Focus Group Interviews
- Student Focus Group Interviews

- School Observation
- Curriculum Review
- School Improvement Plan and Reports
- School Practices Analysis
- Curriculum Processes

Checkpoints	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. The principal assumes, but shares, responsibility for all phases of school operations as well as relations within the school, with the school district, and with the community.					
2. School staff feel that leadership provides clear direction and adequate support in helping to achieve school goals.					
3. A strong collaborative relationship exists between the administration and the leadership of the teachers' union.					
4. Adults in the school share meaningful feedback and suggestions for improving their work.					
5. Adults believe they have a responsibility to help set the tone for student behavior and create an atmosphere of high expectations.					
6. Many teachers are involved in decisions that impact the entire school, not just their individual classrooms.					
7. Faculty and administration demonstrate effective teamwork and leadership.					
8. The administration uses leadership teams, advisory groups, and community representatives to gather information and share goals.					
9. The administration demonstrates that student achievement is a priority by its actions and use of resources to support it.					
10. The administration uses technology (media, newsletters, public service announcements) to communicate the mission of the school to students, faculty, and community.					
11. Current leaders are actively involved in recruiting and mentoring future leaders.					
Comments:					

Summary

Components	Pervasive	Considerable	Partial	Initiated	Absent
1. **Culture of High Expectations and Support.** Create a culture that embraces the belief that all students can benefit from a rigorous and relevant curriculum and provide personalized relationships between adults and students to support high levels of achievement.					
2. **Data-Driven Decisions.** Use data to provide a clear, unwavering focus to curriculum priorities that are both rigorous and relevant, instruction that is personalized and school improvement that is continuous.					
3. **Accountability.** Set high expectations that are monitored, and then hold both students and adults accountable for students' continuous improvement in the curriculum priorities.					
4. **Articulated Curriculum.** Use a framework to organize curriculum that drives instruction toward both rigor and relevance and leads to a continuum of instruction between grades and across disciplines.					
5. **Rigorous and Relevant Instruction.** Teach students through experiences that are challenging, stimulate reflective thought, and are real-world applications of skills and knowledge.					
6. **Personalized Learning.** Create appropriate transitions into and from school and multiple pathways to rigor and relevance based on a student's interests, learning style, aptitude, and needs.					
7. **Professional Learning Communities.** Foster development of a highly collaborative staff and provide sustained professional development focused on the improvement of instruction.					
8. **Partnerships.** Obtain and leverage parent and community involvement resulting in positive relationships with schools.					
9. **School Climate.** Establish and maintain a safe and orderly school.					
10. **Leadership.** Offer effective leadership development for administrators, teachers, parents, and community.					
Comments:					

Additional Comments

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Appendix B

Case Studies

Centreville High School
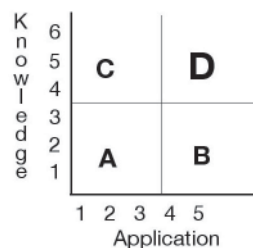# Centreville, Virginia
Fairfax County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- culture of high expectations and support
- data-driven decisions
- shared decision making
- positive school climate
- personalized learning
- rigorous and relevant curriculum
- student engagement

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	2,243
White	49%
Black	10%
Hispanic	9%
Asian	13% (40% Korean)
Economically Disadvantaged	15%
English Language Learners	8%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	94%
Mathematics Pass Rate	87%
Graduation Rate	99%

Executive Summary

Centreville High School (CVHS) is located on the southwestern end of Fairfax County in Virginia and on the edge of the Dulles technology corridor. CVHS continues to grow in enrollment and now serves 2,243 students in grades 9-12. Centreville uses an alternating day block schedule (90 minutes) with a constant period (45 minutes) that meets every day.

The commitment to high expectations and the use of data for decision making, accountability, and student engagement are pervasive at CVHS. Staff members have adopted the characteristics of a professional learning community. Through planning and innovation, time is set aside during the day for teachers to

collaborate on curriculum, develop and implement common assessments, offer students enrichment opportunities, and provide individualized intervention to struggling students. There is a schoolwide emphasis on critical and creative thinking that provides students with learning opportunities that maximize their intellect and abilities.

Staff members encourage students to connect to the school outside of the classroom, as these experiences offer students a greater chance of success. The opportunities afforded at CVHS include, but are not limited to, varsity and junior varsity sports, academic and service clubs, and a variety of other clubs, including business, art, music, forensics, literary, international, honor, and leadership. CVHS's motto is "to excel in all endeavors." This philosophy guides the efforts of everyone in the school, from the administrative team to the teachers and support staff.

In recent years, changing demographics have presented CVHS with some challenges. For the first time last year, the school became a "majority-minority" school. The school's leadership team, in concert with dedicated staff members, has identified and responded to these challenges by

- maintaining a culture of high expectations and achievement among students who have little experience with such a culture
- guaranteeing strong representation and success of minority students in the school's stretch learning initiatives
- overcoming obstacles in communicating with families whose primary language is not English
- overcoming obstacles in communicating with families who may be reluctant to participate in school-parent information programs.

The team has created special programs to ensure success in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Other programs include the creation of community liaison representatives for the Korean and Hispanic communities, implementation of a personalized ninth-grade academy for incoming at-risk students, and time allowances for supportive interventions.

Students follow a seven-credit program over the course of the year, with 90-minute classes on alternating days. CVHS offers a rich range of programs for students in core academics, visual and performing arts, and career and technical education. These programs provide rigorous experiences and real-world applications for all students. The school has no prerequisites for participation in its programs, allowing students to experiment with and experience a wide range of opportunities. Academic performance by students regularly exceeds the state pass rates in core academic areas. Achievement in typically lower-performing subgroups is also above state pass rates, although not yet meeting school goals.

1. School Culture

The school community has focused significant attention on the success of students at all levels. Strategies include challenging less engaged students through the creation of high-minimum course requirements, extensive support services, and attention to the diversity of learner needs. School leaders have created an environment of professional commitment and collaboration. Professional learning is directly related to school needs as defined by comprehensive data analyses.

Virginia's *Standards of Learning* (SOL) guide much of the curriculum and ensure that every student completes a rigorous course of study. Because high-stakes assessments affect the students as well as the school, programs have been implemented to make sure that each student is successfully guided on a track toward graduation.

For example, the school has implemented an initiative called **PLUS (Practice, Learn, Understand, Study)** that provides the necessary flexibility to help each child succeed. A 30-minute period has been built into the daily schedule so that struggling students can receive additional support from a teacher or other mentor. At this time, other students can engage in enrichment activities, or they can study in a supervised setting. PLUS helps students better understand previously introduced material through review, remediation, and enrichment activities, or through activities that otherwise support the curriculum and learning. The administrative team recently completed a faculty survey to determine the effectiveness of the program and to solicit suggestions for improvement. The survey is another example of the school's culture of commitment to

continuous improvement. In addition, there are programs geared toward helping mainstream and AP students who may be struggling at the end of a grading period.

The school also has implemented a number of measures over the years to respond to the increasing numbers in minority populations. The **entrance to the building**, for example, is decorated with flags representing the countries of student origin. This simple public display illustrates that diversity is celebrated. CVHS has community liaisons that help with the cultural and linguistic challenges of parents of Hispanic and Korean students. The *Parent/Student Resource Guide* also has special sections translated into Korean and Spanish. Students do not self-divide along racial or ethnic lines in classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, or other public spaces. Instead, they are seen working and laughing together, and this carries over into academic expectations.

2. Core Academic Learning

The latest available data show that 94 percent of the students scored at or above the proficient level in English, 87 percent in mathematics, 83 percent in science, and 92 percent in history and social science. In each category, performance by CVHS students met or exceeded the state pass rates, and in half the subjects they exceeded the state level by three or four points. Although student subgroup performances were slightly lower across the board, performances by CVHS subgroups were generally higher than the same subgroups at the state level. This is significant given the fact that for the last set of test scores (2006), the minority population was nearly equal in size to that of the majority population. The only subgroup not represented in CVHS results was American Indian students.

CVHS has an **extensive School Improvement Plan** for the 2005-2007 school years. That plan focuses on key areas such as ensuring that all students read at or above grade level, increasing the number of students with disabilities served in general education classes, increasing the number of students participating in AP courses and the International Baccalaureate program (offered in one of the academies), and increasing participation by subgroups in all courses. The plan does not propose taking the school in radical new directions in an attempt to influence student achievement, but rather highlights the intense commitment to continue to improve an already successful program.

Additionally, the school, students, and/or faculty have earned the following honors and/or awards:

- National Street Law Educator of the Year, 2007
- Herndon/Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce Teacher of the Year, 2007
- Teacher nominated by The College Board for AP teacher recognition—100 percent of AP Calculus students scored a 3 or better, 2006-2007
- First Year Principal of the Year 2006–Nancy Sprague Leadership Award and Fairfax County
- Federation of Teachers Principal of the Year, 2006
- *Newsweek* magazine Top 100 Award High Schools, two years in a row
- Centreville Auto Technicians Program (Certified by the National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence)
- National Forensics Competition, First Place, 2006
- Model Judiciary Team qualified for the Virginia State Supreme Court competition, 2007
- National Merit Scholar, 2007
- *Literary Magazine*, Gold Medalist Certificate and Silver Crown Award, Columbia
- Scholastic Press Association, 2006
- State Wrestling Heavyweight Title, 2006

3. Stretch Learning

The 2005-2007 School Improvement Plan contains numerous examples of stretch learning at CVHS. Opportunities include an Advanced Placement diploma; **a business partnership with global consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton** that includes activities such as Engineering Day; and certification programs that enable students to become **industry certified in computer technology areas, auto technology, criminal justice, and marketing.** CVHS has an active chapter of the National Honor Society designed to encourage wide-ranging academic achievement by all. As previously mentioned, the school also has the PLUS program, significant not

only for its focus on helping struggling students, but also as planned time to encourage stretch learning for students. CVHS provides additional support for Advanced Placement students with an AP study hall.

The staff at CVHS is aware that the challenge of a shifting demographic also means that they must always be shifting strategies to attract members of the various subgroups to the most rigorous courses. One successful strategy has been the implementation of a **summer AP boot camp** to give invited students a chance to experience the rigors of an AP class before they begin the school year. Students are exposed not only to the content, but also to the variety of supports that ensure success in these difficult courses. Students in the boot camp are connected with a mentor and tracked throughout the year.

CVHS offers a variety of solutions to students seeking to take AP courses, but who might otherwise fall victim to scheduling conflicts. The administrative team and counselors are committed to making it possible for **students to take any AP course they choose**. In addition to the wide range of AP courses offered on campus, students also have the option of choosing among 15 online AP courses. **Online courses** also provide opportunity for students to take not only required courses, but also specialized courses in advanced accounting, aerospace science, or network administration.

A connection to success beyond high school is reflected in the variety of courses, activities, and extracurricular offerings that students can select. The school has an outstanding **Career Center**. Students are given specialized help with college selection and admission processes. The auto technology center provides students with advantages for getting started in certification programs in a field in which there is great demand. In addition to programs offered on campus, students can choose to be involved with one of the **many high school academies** available in Fairfax County. The academies are located at six other Fairfax County schools and offer programs for students interested in international studies and business, engineering and scientific technology, health and human services, or communications and the visual and performing arts. Many students take advantage of the academy experience for part of the day.

4. Student Engagement

One of the critical components in **reducing the number of dropouts** is to make sure that students feel successful in school. The implementation of the PLUS program is an ideal example of support designed to ensure the success of each student. While the traditional offering of after-school tutoring has been in place for a long time, the **PLUS program** makes sure that students can get that **help during the regular school day.** This is handled on a case-by-case referral basis. At the end of each grading period, students' grades are analyzed. If a student is found to be failing or getting a D in three or more classes, that student is immediately identified for more intense and focused work. The performance of students in the AP classes is also carefully monitored, and there are intervention responses that will automatically kick in when students in those classes begin having trouble.

Although intervention programs are important, the **special relationships built between students and adults** have been identified as a key factor in success at CVHS. Interviews are full of references such as, "The teachers do whatever is necessary to help us succeed" and "We frequently stay after school to make sure we can give individual help to students." Casual conversations between teachers and students in the hallways demonstrate the deep commitment on the part of every person in the school to see that every student is successful. Although there is no formal mentoring program in the school, the students often mentioned that they felt they could talk to their teachers about anything. Many students credited these relationships as the reason they are successful at this school.

A large number of students are involved in at least one **extracurricular activity**. These range from being part of one of the outstanding athletic teams to participating in the numerous clubs and honor societies. CVHS also has worked diligently to connect students to one another and to the school community through the inclusion of stakeholders from the community's minority populations in the planning and life of the school. This has been accomplished through the creation of **community liaison positions** for the Hispanic and Asian communities. In addition, the school's **commitment to data analysis** has provided the backdrop for the identification of special needs.

5. Personal Skill Development

One unique element used to enhance character education is the school's **Leadership Training Class**. This one-

credit class provides students with a unique opportunity to be directly involved with the daily life of CVHS. It focuses on personal organizational skills, time management, and communication, as well as the necessary tools to organize larger activities such as class and school elections and other school events. This class is unique because it is taught by upperclassmen who took the course during their freshman or sophomore year. Students also may elect to take **a peer mediation course** in which they are trained to participate in the school's peer mediation program. This course is made up of intensive training sessions that focus on a range of strategies, including problem solving and reflective thinking skills. Students develop interpersonal and leadership skills that can be used to mediate a variety of disputes.

Through curricular and extracurricular courses, students also have the chance to develop their **creativity and intellectual curiosity.** In these courses, students have the chance to develop talents and skills in a variety of visual and performing arts programs that also include the latest technology. Although there is no mandated community service or service-learning requirement, CVHS students participate in many community service activities. The majority of these are organized through their clubs and classes.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

More than 60 percent of Centreville students participate in **Advanced Placement courses** and graduate with a Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma. There is strong evidence of a commitment to not only the rigor associated with such programs but also the relevance of these courses to real-world situations. In core academic classes, lessons are extended to connect to contemporary issues. In the areas of visual and performing arts, students participate not only in local performances but also travel to perform in state, regional, and national competitions and/or exhibitions. In the career and technical education programs, students extend their learning via school/student-run business applications.

Staff collaboration manifests itself in rich and varied **interdisciplinary units of instruction**. Collegial conversations regularly focus on ways in which units of instruction may be coordinated among departments as well as on ways colleagues may support one another through interdisciplinary reinforcement of key concepts.

There are no school-created access barriers to academic programs. Students are encouraged to explore a variety of challenging options. **School organization** (sub-schools or houses with dedicated sub-school leaders and professional support services) fosters the **personalization of schedules for students**. In addition to rich offerings within the traditional academic content areas, CVHS has many **opportunities in the areas of career and technical education**. Available career and technical certifications include computer technology (Microsoft certification), automotive technology, criminal justice, and marketing.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Virginia has a strong alignment of standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments. Additionally, Fairfax County has extended this alignment to include a Fairfax County Program of Studies (POS). The County POS further clarifies and defines expectations for teachers and students. CVHS staff extensively use the materials provided by the Virginia Department of Education and the Fairfax County Public Schools central office. Students have benefited significantly from this process and enjoy the results of a coordinated sequence of learning outcomes and experiences.

Data play an integral part in the decisions concerning Centreville programs. **Formative assessments, as well as periodic summative assessments,** are used extensively to determine the progress of individual students, teacher performance, and program effectiveness. Although currently used data tools allow staff to identify student concerns by standards cluster for the state's *Standards of Learning* (SOL), an improved system that will include performance on Fairfax County program standards will now be implemented. There is a **regular process of self-evaluation** completed on a department and individual basis. Centreville staff members make extensive use of an available assessment-authoring tool to create periodic, formative assessments designed to identify areas of strength and weakness in students. **Instructional adjustments** based on these results are also the norm, rather than the exception. The school has employed an assessment specialist and utilizes this professional expertise to inform teachers about the meaning and implications of available assessment data. Additional ways in which data are used to inform school decisions include

- collection of student performance information via a variety of **assessment strategies** (e.g., portfolios, student demonstrations, group and individual projects)

- **surveys** of student and community satisfaction
- **follow-up studies of students after graduation** regarding the quality of their experiences
- **electronic parent information system,** called **Touching Base**, which makes student performance information available to parents.

8. Transitions

Transitional anxiety affects students as they move between buildings or experience abrupt changes in expectations. This student anxiety is a key factor in the underperformance of high school students and has been identified as a cause in the deterioration of student relationships and engagement.

One way transitional anxiety is curbed is through the school's sub-school culture. The **school is divided into four sub-schools**. Students are grouped alphabetically and remain with their sub-school throughout their stay at Centreville. The sub-school structure at Centreville brings a team of professionals together who are primarily responsible for a smaller grouping of students. This team meets regularly to discuss individual student needs. It brings together academic and emotional support systems for students in an atmosphere in which personalization is fostered and highly valued. Additionally, the school administrators refer to this structure as a form of "one-stop shopping" for parents, allowing them quick access to adults who know their child best.

While the nature of the programs and experiences in the county schools have minimized the difficulty of such transitions for many students, Centreville staff recently identified a recurring pattern among a small subset of incoming ninth graders. These students were having difficulty making the transition to the expectations of the Centreville school culture. The planned response to this situation will be the implementation of the CVHS **Freshman Academy**. The academy will include smaller classes, shared core teachers, and emphasize reading, study skills, and test-taking skills. In addition, these students will be graded using a common rubric, and will have portfolio/performance-based assessments.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

Good schools are rarely without strong and positive leadership. Centreville is no exception. The principal is a respected, dedicated, and gifted educator. He has impressed the staff with his sense of **inclusion and collaboration**. His commitment to the continuation of the school's success and the maintenance of its exceptional reputation is clear. What is equally important is his understanding that the continuation of the school's success is directly related to the success of its students and its staff. The principal has worked with the staff to identify areas of strength, recognized the importance of their contributions, and helped to target new areas for improvement.

Teachers and members of the school leadership team cited the principal's collaborative approaches to problem solving and his unfailing commitment to high standards as a critical aspect of their success. Staff members regularly described him as a gentle man with firm convictions and a clear vision of how adults and students should be treated.

The concept of **shared leadership**, which seems an integral part of the school's culture, does not end with its adults. Centreville High School has an extensive program for student leadership. Student government is a vibrant force in the school. As with many of the school's strengths, this is also not left to chance. An elective course in leadership provides students with hands-on learning experiences designed to enhance their comfort and skills in leadership roles. Classes provide "laboratories in leadership."

Sub-school principals and department supervisors are actively engaged in the identification of areas for improvement. Time is provided for such discussion and analysis. It is clear that results, rather than processes, are valued in Centreville. There is a focus on the professionalism of the staff and its involvement in decisions affecting the staff and the school's students. This focus on utilizing the skills of the staff is an intentional part of retaining the high-quality staff recruited for the school. Sub-school organization has created many opportunities for staff to become involved in the identification and resolution of problem areas, whether they are organizational or instructional. Teachers feel valued and cared for. It is clear that they are translating these positive responses to the students of CVHS.

10. Professional Learning Community
During the past several years, the school has participated in the county School Plan for Improvement process, as well as in a SACS CASI self-evaluation. Beginning four years ago, the school engaged in a **"build-a-school"** project to coordinate the visions of community stakeholders, the future of the school, and its mission. Key vision elements were labeled as "bricks" in the new school and were incorporated into a large visual in which participants could view the confluence of their individual visions. This work provided the foundation for subsequent plans for school improvement. This plan included the development of a school-based Professional Learning Community (PLC). During the past four years, the school has continued to devote time and resources to the continued development of the PLC concept. The PLC provides a research-based vehicle for ongoing discussion, modeling, and evaluation of best instructional practices. Instructional strategies are discussed in department, grade level, and content-area meetings in which the connection between state standards, the county's program of studies, best practices, and assessments are analyzed.

The **commitment to professional learning** among Centreville High School faculty extends well beyond the creation of professional learning communities. The school leaders and staff collectively identify common areas for exploration based on student performance reports. Faculty members work together within department/content groups to bring improvements to their classes. The school provides shared folder access on its computer system so that department members may post and share lessons, assessments, projects, and other resources. This use of technology has increased the level and depth of conversation among staff members.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners
CVHS has a number of options available for struggling students. Staff members are the primary resource for such students. Students and teachers identified the relationship between staff and students as a major part of the positive culture that characterizes the school. Because of this relationship, students are encouraged to seek help and they are confident that teachers will be available to assist them. On a more structured basis, CVHS provides an array of programs intended to help students meet the challenges of the school's commitment to high expectations.

- The implementation of the **PLUS program** is probably the best example of support designed to ensure the success of each student. The school's PLUS period provides a structured time for students to receive academic help. In many instances, this option provides them with the opportunity to learn from different instructors and materials.
- **Peer tutoring** is offered during and after school by the various honor societies.
- **Stepcats Program** provides tutoring by business and community tutors on Saturday mornings.
- **Comprehensive folders containing information about student performance** are maintained and utilized to determine additional support needs.
- **A structured process for identifying students who are struggling** is in place. Students who have received multiple grades of "D" or below are referred for one or more of the support options.

In the past several years, CVHS has become a majority-minority school, with the Korean population representing approximately 40 percent of the school's minority population. Programs to support these students as second language learners are highly developed and effective. To encourage greater participation in the school's extensive Advanced Placement offerings, Centreville provides a **summer orientation program for AP students**. This orientation program is flexible enough to accommodate summer travel and athletic practice schedules and has been instrumental in increasing minority participation in such courses. **School outreach programs** to the minority communities include **liaison representatives from the Korean and Hispanic communities**. These programs provide an additional source of support and information about support options for potentially struggling students.

As with all schools that focus on rigorous and relevant instruction, the support for students that allows them to achieve at the expected levels without lowering standards is critical. The environment of caring relationships that exists at Centreville has created a climate in which students accept the support as nothing more than an extension of a helping hand from adults they trust.

Lessons Learned

Through intentional, thoughtful, and aggressive programming, it is possible to reduce student isolation and include minority students in the school's culture of high expectations. This can be accomplished through

- using **minority group liaisons** to connect the school and its mission to the members of the minority communities

- using aggressive **student support systems** to encourage participation and ensure success of minority students in rigorous courses.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. As a "majority-minority" school, CVHS is committed to fostering an **appreciation for cultural diversity** while celebrating the uniqueness of all of our students. We are proud that we challenge CVHS students to be stewards of one another and the emotional climate of our school.

2. **Ground Floor Governance**: The success of Centreville High School is the result of the combined efforts of the community, parents, students, and faculty. The decision-making process involves all stakeholders who together formulate goals and objectives for CVHS, as well as develop action plans to achieve these goals and objectives. Students, staff, and the community at large are enfranchised through committees that offer multiple opportunities to discuss and determine issues and concerns. Much of the collaboration that is part of CVHS's culture is a result of concerted efforts to provide common planning time among departmental teams and to foster professional learning communities throughout the academic community.

3. The sub-school model is utilized to create a **smaller environment within the school**, making administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and specialists immediately accessible to all students. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining the best faculty members help our school to have a passionate, capable, and dedicated staff who use best practices and are dedicated to putting students at the heart of what we do on a daily basis. Centreville High School is keenly interested in building a staff body that is committed to continuing to develop authentic motivational strategies for our students by examining comprehensive research and implementing those strategies that target many of our subgroups.
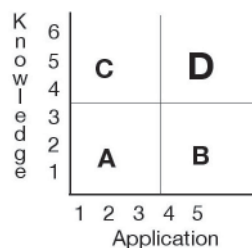
Chatham High School
Chatham, Virginia
Pittsylvania County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- student engagement
- culture of change
- culture of high expectations
- data-driven decisions
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- personal skill development
- CTE integration

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	713
White	68%
Black	32%
Hispanic	9%
Asian	0%
Economically Disadvantaged	68%
English Language Learners	1%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	93%
Mathematics Pass Rate	91%
Graduation Rate	75%

Executive Summary

Chatham High School (CHS) is a comprehensive high school located in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. It is one of four high schools serving the county. The school opened in the fall of 1964 as a result of the consolidation of community schools. In 1969, the school system was desegregated, which brought all students living within the assigned geographic area into the school. CHS is a diverse school with white students comprising 68 percent of the population and African-American students 32 percent. More than 68 percent of CHS students qualify as economically disadvantaged. The school's budget reflects the economy of the area, which is listed as among the

lowest 5 percent in the state. CHS is a good example of a school doing more with less.

The administration and staff at CHS rely heavily on data to guide programs and develop new initiatives. For example, the analysis of *Standards of Learning* (SOL) results revealed a need for increased attention to reading. As a result, the school has implemented a reading program for all students and has provided reading comprehension information about each student. Parents and teachers can use this data to support particular student needs.

Opportunities for students at CHS include strong academic programs, dual-enrollment and distance learning programs, rich business and career and technical education options, and extensive co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities. Area students take full advantage of these options, and levels of student participation are exceptionally high. More than 80 percent of CHS students participate in at least one club or extracurricular activity. Students cite the availability of such opportunities as a major strength of the school.

CHS uses a 4 x 4 block schedule, with a standard 180-day calendar. The school provides a variety of course offerings both on-site through the local community college and via the state's distance learning network. These offerings provide for students at all levels, although all students are encouraged to elect the more rigorous course options. The school has clear expectations for students, both behaviorally and academically.

CHS is a school that has turned itself around. The redevelopment of the school is largely the work of the school's principal. His presence in the school is obvious. Students and staff remark on the importance of his leadership in the current success of CHS. The members of the administrative team and the staff agree that the establishment of a climate conducive to learning has served as the bridge to higher academic expectations and has made the school a destination school for area teachers.

The principal has used the requirement of passing SOL assessments to graduate to instill in students an understanding of the relationship between hard work and high achievement. He has also created an environment in which learning takes place in the context of a clear code of conduct, with rewards and consequences. He has developed seven steps to lead CHS to its current levels of success:

1. Create a climate for teaching and learning.
2. Keep students in school—eliminate out-of-school suspensions.
3. Create a Behavior Modification Center.
4. Publish expectations.
5. Hold students to these expectations.
6. Appreciate teachers.
7. Involve parents in both discipline and academic issues.

The school's **Behavior Modification Center (BMC)** provides a place for students to have a constructive experience when they are not ready to participate appropriately in classroom instruction. Students who are referred to the BMC may complete teacher-provided assignments or may be asked to complete behavior modules that address an area defined by the classroom teacher or the BMC director.

It is clear that a collegial and caring climate, an environment of high expectations, a strong system of student support, and strong leadership have resulted in an exceptional experience for adults and students alike.

1. School Culture

At first glance, CHS appears to be a sleepy, comfortable school nestled in a rural setting. This appearance belies the level of activity and the quality of experiences that are available to CHS students. The members of the administrative team assembled by the principal describe two key characteristics of the school:

- the use of the requirement to pass SOL assessments to graduate to instill in students a **recognition of the relationship between hard work and high achievement**

- the establishment of an environment in which learning can take place through an implementation of a **clear code of conduct, with rewards and consequences.**

Teachers and school leaders have used the requirement to pass SOL assessments to graduate as a means of helping students recognize the connection between hard work and goal attainment. The school believes that, with persistence and sufficient support, all students are capable of completing high-quality work. The principal has described the process of establishing these critical characteristics in the seven-step process listed above.

The school is a warm and welcoming place. Staff members and administrators are highly visible. It is obvious the principal is tireless in this pursuit as he follows students and engages them in numerous encouraging conversations. His previous experience as a successful coach appears to serve him well in this process. Students reported that they understand that "you come to Chatham to work hard and to be respectful."

As a result of the development of the current, positive climate, teachers report that CHS has become an attractive option for area teachers. Staff members come to the school because of the environment of learning and serve as active "salespeople" for prospective staff.

The school's mission statement is a living document, and its impact on the school is evident in a variety of ways. According to the mission statement, "Chatham High School will prepare responsible, productive citizens." The mission incorporates the following guiding principles that pertain to teachers, students, and parents:

- Promote collaboration.
- Instill a life-long love of learning.
- Develop positive character traits.
- Teach practical knowledge, oral and written communication techniques, and critical-thinking skills.
- Provide a safe, academically challenging educational environment.
- Recognize individual differences.
- Maintain standards of equity.

School leaders have created an environment of professional commitment and collaboration. Professional learning is directly related to school needs as defined by comprehensive data-collection efforts. Professional commitment to the culture of change seems unwavering.

In addition to the strong community support for the school's academic programs, the CHS athletic programs have played a critical role in maintaining the sense of connection and pride within the community. The school's successes in this area are reflected in the following list of accomplishments:

- District Champions in Boys Outdoor Track (second year in a row), 2007
- District Champions in Baseball, 2007
- District Champions in Girls Basketball (third year in a row), 2007
- District Champions in Boys Outdoor Track, 2006
- District Champions in Girls Basketball, 2006
- District Champions in Boys Basketball, 2006
- Varsity Football Records (first 10-win season and first playoff win), 2005
- State Runner-Up in Softball, 2005
- State Runner-Up in Baseball, 2005
- Regional Champions in Baseball, 2005
- District Champions in Baseball, 2005
- Regional Champions in Boys Basketball, 2005
- District Champions in Girls Basketball (first time in school history), 2005
- District Champions in Softball (first time in school history), 2004
- District Champions in Baseball, 2004

2. Core Academic Learning

CHS has done an excellent job of enabling its students to succeed on the state's large-scale assessment program, which is connected to high school graduation. CHS students met the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

requirements and have exceeded the state averages in the mandated test areas of reading, mathematics, and writing. On Virginia's English SOL assessment, 93 percent of CHS students have scored at or above the proficient level. In mathematics, 91 percent of CHS students scored at or above the proficient level. All subgroups have exceeded the state's performance standards. It is clear from these results and from observations in the school that race and poverty are not limiting factors at CHS.

All students are encouraged to schedule rigorous courses of study. The school's planning efforts result in the development of a four-year career plan and in the scheduling of courses that complement the interests and goals of the students. The CHS guidance staff meets with students at the beginning of their ninth-grade year to help them with the development of a career plan aimed at enabling the students to identify and achieve their school and post-high school goals. They then ensure each year that students schedule courses consistent with these plans.

The CHS program of studies includes strong core courses available to all students, as well as a rich selection of elective offerings.

No climate of high expectations can be successful without the support programs necessary to assist students who struggle with these high standards. CHS offers a number of such options, all of which serve to encourage students to reach beyond their comfort zones safe in the knowledge that they will be supported and helped.

3. Stretch Learning

CHS is a small school of 713 students. In many schools, this size would limit the variety of options available to students. As a part of their commitment to the success of all students, CHS school leaders have developed a rich offering of programs that challenge students. While offering a limited number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses (Calculus, Government, and U.S. History), CHS encourages students to **access the Virginia online opportunities for additional AP offerings**. Further programs that allow students to access challenging learning experiences include

- **Graduate of Merit** is a local elective diploma endorsement for students who complete the CHS community service requirement.

- **Project Lead the Way** is a national engineering and technology program designed to

  » increase the number of young people who pursue engineering and engineering technology programs requiring a four- or two-year college degree
  » provide equitable and inclusive opportunities for all academically qualified students without regard to gender or ethnic origin
  » provide clear standards and expectations for student success in the program
  » reduce the future college attrition rate with four- and two-year engineering and engineering technology programs
  » provide leadership and support that will produce continuous improvement and innovation in the program
  » contribute to the continuance of America's national prosperity.

- **Teachers for Tomorrow** is a program offered to high school juniors and seniors interested in pursuing a career in education. The program is designed to attract candidates from high schools to the field of education through exposure to a world-class curriculum and a hands-on experience that focuses on teaching.

- **Piedmont Governor's School for Mathematics, Science, and Technology** is a program focused on mathematics and science, with technology being utilized to support and enhance the curriculum. The school provides a special alternative opportunity for motivated secondary students who want to become part of an exciting and challenging program of studies in mathematics and science. Classes are on a 2 x 2 alternating block schedule with each class meeting for 90 minutes. Seniors are required to complete a mentorship outside of the classroom.

- **Future Farmers of America** is a program of the National FFA Organization, which is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. These highly effective and popular programs provide students with both rigorous and relevant experiences in key areas of interest and need to local communities.

4. Student Engagement

CHS students are strongly connected to their school. **Extracurricular programs and clubs** are a part of 80 percent of students' experiences. This high level of engagement reflects the positive relationships that exist between the students and adults in the CHS community. Interviews with students and teachers revealed the strong sense of belonging and commitment that pervades the school. Students regularly cited the willingness of staff members to be helpful as a key factor in their connection to the school.

It is obvious that the administrators and staff of CHS take the responsibility for ensuring positive student/adult relationships seriously. Instruction is focused around student interests. Students are active participants in their learning. Teachers make concerted efforts to connect instruction to the lives of the CHS students.

The size of CHS facilitates the **positive relationships** that characterize the school. Students reported that teachers know them by name and use this personal knowledge to ensure that they are doing well. CHS has a number of formal intervention programs:

- **Behavior Modification Center** (BMC, described below)
- **Computer-assisted instruction programs** that provide credit recovery and remediation
- **Career Academy**–a computer-based program for students who have dropped out
- **Student self-referral and teacher nomination programs**–for scheduled support sessions

These programs provide students with a variety of ways in which they can be successful in the school's atmosphere of high expectations.

5. Personal Skill Development

The 80 percent participation rate in CHS co-curricular and/or extracurricular activities represents an increase of 30 percent in the past three years. This gain reveals the commitment of school leaders and staff to providing students with chances to explore their interests and achieve personal growth.

Leadership opportunities are rich at CHS. Student government, team and club leadership options, as well as programs that focus on the development of personal skills (such as FFA and FBLA), all provide students with an impressive array of options.

The school's **Behavior Modification Center**, which is utilized by teachers when students are not ready to participate appropriately in classroom learning experiences, provides an additional opportunity for personal growth. Students who are referred to the BMC may complete teacher-provided assignments or may be asked to complete behavior modules that address an area defined by the classroom teacher or the BMC director. Although students did not want to be referred to the BMC, they acknowledged the value of this program.

The CHS guidance staff meets with students at the beginning of the ninth-grade year to help them with the **development of a four-year plan** aimed at enabling the students to identify and achieve their high school and post-high school goals. They then ensure each year that students schedule courses consistent with these plans.

Students and teachers indicate race and poverty are not limiting factors for the members of the CHS school community. In core courses, challenging programs, and extracurricular activities, the high participation rate of students is reflective of the school's makeup.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

Because of the close alignment between the state's core standards and its large-scale assessment program, there is **great clarity about what should be taught.** The alignment of standards to instruction is evident. CHS uses **curriculum guides** as well as **pacing documents** to ensure that teachers are providing consistent experiences

among classes. The introduction of **common assessments** has also aided in the consistency of instruction. As the environment has become more conducive to teaching and learning, the school has responded with courses and programs that provide rigorous and relevant learning experiences for CHS students.

Classroom observations reveal a consistently high level of instruction with an **emphasis on higher level thinking skills**. The school has a number of programs that help infuse rigorous and relevant instruction to core subjects, including

- Career and Technical Education
- Project Lead the Way
- Visual and performing arts.

An analysis of assessment results showed that CHS students needed **additional support in reading**. Programs to support this need were implemented across the curriculum.

School leaders refer to the establishment of a **disciplined school environment** as the bridge to successful instructional outcomes. These high behavioral expectations have been closely connected to high expectations in classroom instruction. Students are encouraged to perform at the level of the school's expectations and are supported in their efforts to do so.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

CHS looks carefully and reflectively at student performance data in a variety of ways. The division's central office staff has provided significant levels of support for the development of strong curricular offerings. The **analysis of SOL assessment results** has been used to determine the needs of the school. As an example of this process, the analysis of SOL results revealed a need for increased attention to reading. Consequently, the school has implemented a **schoolwide reading program** and has provided reading comprehension information about each student. A similar analysis of the school's SAT results has resulted in the implementation of an **SAT-preparation program** for CHS students.

In addition to the analysis of SOL assessment results, CHS administers course assessments at 6- and 12-week intervals. Data from these assessments are used to determine needs and areas for increased emphasis. The collegial environment that exists at CHS facilitates the use of this data for discussions about how to improve the school.

Again, because of the strong alignment of state standards and assessments, there are minimal requirements for CHS staff to create this alignment. Instead, the staff can, and do, focus attention on data related to student performance and how it should inform their instruction. While students are aware of the need to perform well on the state's assessment, instruction does not appear to be preoccupied with this emphasis. Teachers do, however, regularly inform students about how what they are learning might appear or be used on the state assessments

School leaders have made **data analysis a part of the culture of the school**. Data are used to highlight any gaps that exist between student performance and district benchmarks. All applicable subgroups are analyzed to assess necessary instructional responses to underperformance. Additionally, **school-improvement plans** are developed in relation to the analysis of student performance data.

Teacher use of data is a normal part of decision making regarding individual and schoolwide professional growth options and programs. Staff members review data as a part of the process of establishing school goals and professional development programs.

8. Transitions

The primary source of support for students in transition at CHS is the **small-school climate of caring and concern**. Transitional programs, as they exist, are traditional in nature and include orientation programs for incoming students and their parents. Because of the nature of the community, many parents have attended the school themselves and many students are familiar with **the building as a center of community activities.**

The clarity of CHS expectations and the support for the successful accomplishment of these expectations offer a strong sense of familiarity for incoming CHS students. The awareness of these expectations within the community precludes the need for larger scale orientation programs.

Within CHS, students have access to a variety of support opportunities. For incoming freshmen who need additional support in mathematics, the school offers a computer-assisted option. The program provides students with the opportunity to move through basic algebra skills quickly so that they can join their peers in traditional algebra courses. The Behavior Modification Center also familiarizes incoming students in a positive way to the school's behavioral and academic expectations.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

Interviewed staff and students are unanimous in their description of the **importance of the school's principal**, in the success of the school. He is an enthusiastic and committed educator. He is visible in many aspects of the school. He does not, however, dominate the school or its culture. It is clear that the school reflects his energy, dedication, and commitment. It is equally clear, however, that he is valued as a listener and as a leader who provides "guidance without interference."

The principal has assembled a team of able educators who share his vision of the school, the means by which excellence can be achieved, and his dedication. The team's role in the development of the school's culture was also recognized by the staff. A **spirit of collaboration** is evident at CHS. There is a **unity of purpose** that has enabled the school and its staff to provide the kind of direction that has resulted in such positive results.

The **presence of administrators at school functions** was frequently cited by the students as a factor in the positive relationships that exist in the school and the students' willingness to abide by the school's firm code of conduct. **Signs depicting the school's vision and mission** are prominently displayed. Teachers participate in planning staff development activities that have been identified as advancing the school's mission. Staff members also recognize the importance of the school leader's assessments of their needs and these are blended into professional growth opportunities.

10. Professional Learning Community

Conversations with staff reveal a genuine appreciation for and commitment to the process of **continuous learning and exploration**. Teachers indicated that they work closely together to

- support one another through interdisciplinary reinforcement of key concepts
- plan instruction that addresses the needs identified via state and local assessments
- discuss ways in which programs might be altered to respond to student needs
- mentor teachers new to the district to ensure that they are aware of the culture of the school and that they are comfortable with policies and procedures.

Teachers are actively engaged in the development of both their content knowledge and their instructional skills. County-needs assessment and locally defined priorities are used to shape the school's professional development needs. Teachers described this as a collaborative process.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

CHS has implemented a range of programs and procedures aimed at reducing the problems faced by struggling learners. These are an integral part of the school day, and students are assigned to such programs based on need. Students also may decide for themselves that they need additional support. Tutoring sessions are available on a regular basis, and students are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities. A number of other programs are available:

- A computer-assisted instruction program that provides credit-recovery opportunities is offered to students.

- An online Web-based program is offered to incoming freshmen who have been identified as lacking the skills necessary for success in traditional algebra courses. The provider has placed a full-time lab technician to oversee the hardware/software. The school schedules a mathematics teacher for the students who move through computer-assisted lessons and are supported in small groups by the teacher. Students who complete this program may enter regularly scheduled algebra classes or may proceed to the next level in the program. This approach targets instruction to student learning styles. School leaders and teachers are

exploring the use of the system for students who are not at-risk to create opportunities for students to experience instruction that is matched to their learning styles.

- **The Behavior Modification Center** has been identified as successful in areas of behavior improvement and instructional support. Teachers cite the usefulness of having a place for students to have a constructive experience when they are not ready to participate in a positive manner in classroom instruction. The combination of self-paced behavior modules and teacher-directed learning activities appears to be a valuable tool in maintaining the school's environment of high behavioral and academic expectations.

- **Career Academy** is for students who have dropped out and want to get a high school diploma. Students are scheduled into a computer-assisted SOL preparation program that is run in conjunction with a local community service agency that encourages youths to graduate from high school and think about their future. Students work independently under the guidance of a CHS teacher. Several students interviewed credited this program with helping them reorder their lives and get back on track to obtain a high school diploma.

CHS is also using its inclusion program to provide necessary support for special needs students scheduled in separate classes, as well as mainstream students who can benefit from additional support. However, student interviews clearly show that the primary source of support for struggling students remains the CHS teachers and school leaders.

Lessons Learned

- In schools that want or need to "turn around," the establishment of clear expectations and the support of these expectations are critical.

- The school has successfully incorporated the values, needs, and interests of a rural community into an atmosphere of high behavioral and academic expectations.

- The areas, such as career and technical education, that traditionally have provided students with rich, hands-on relevant experiences provide excellent models for bringing such instruction to core content classes.

- Typically underperforming subgroup populations can be highly successful in an environment of high expectations when expectations are clear, support is extensive, and adults show that they care. These factors generate the respect and trust that are required for the levels of engagement necessary for high academic performance.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. The faculty and staff have created an environment of **professional commitment and collaboration.**

2. Chatham High School enjoys **strong parental and community support**. In addition to the strong community support for the school's academic programs, the CHS athletic programs have played a critical role in maintaining the sense of connection and pride within the community.

3. Our school is committed to a **rigorous and challenging academic program** that provides students numerous opportunities to explore their interests and abilities. Programs such as Project Lead the Way (a national engineering and technology program), Teachers for Tomorrow, and the Piedmont Governor's School for Mathematics, Science, & Technology are all excellent opportunities for personal growth, leadership development, and for students to explore their strengths.
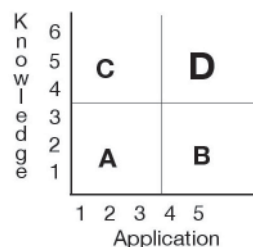
Douglas S. Freeman High School
Richmond, Virginia
Henrico County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- transitional programming
- high expectations
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- shared decision making
- personalized support system
- personal skill development
- student engagement

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	1,672
White	75%
Black	11%
Hispanic	5%
Asian	6%
Economically Disadvantaged	27%
English Language Learners	7.4%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	94%
Mathematics Pass Rate	90%
Graduation Rate	85%

Executive Summary

Douglas Southall Freeman High School (DSFHS) is a comprehensive high school serving 1,672 students in Henrico County, a suburban county adjoining Richmond. DSFHS has a long history and reputation for academic and athletic excellence. Its students are proud of their rich history and accept their role in the continuation of this legacy.

The school recently celebrated its 50th anniversary and seeks to carry on the tradition of its namesake, Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman, a famous newspaper editor and Pulitzer Prize-winning author. The program

of studies at DSFHS provides broad opportunities in academics, athletics, and co-curricular programming. Students exceed averages for both state and national assessments. DSFHS athletic teams have also excelled, winning more than 65 percent of their competitions during the school's long history. Co-curricular successes at the state and national level are equally notable in programs such as the visual and performing arts.

DSFHS uses a traditional seven-period day with a 23-minute lunch period. The school also houses one of Henrico County's Center-based magnet programs, the Center for Leadership, Government, and Global Studies. The program of studies for DSFHS students includes standard core courses, honors courses, advanced placement options, and a growing number of dual-enrollment opportunities.

Demographically, DSFHS is a school in transition. While historically serving a population of moderate wealth, the school's demographics now include a significant increase in poverty (as reflected by the school's free/reduced lunch percentage of 27 percent). As a further reflection of the area's shifting demographics, the school now enrolls nearly 150 students in its English as Second Language program. The state report card reveals that the composition of the student body is now 75 percent white, 11 percent black, 6 percent Asian, and 5 percent Hispanic.

While experiencing these demographic changes, DSFHS has maintained its culture of high expectations and student achievement. In the 2006 English *Standards of Learning* (SOL) assessment, 94 percent of DSFHS students achieved proficiency. In mathematics, 90 percent of DSFHS students achieved proficiency; in history and social science, 97 percent; and in science 91 percent.

As the composition of the student body has changed, the school's leaders have recognized that a key element in the maintenance of the culture of high achievement is the **orientation of incoming students to the expectations of the school**. The administrative team has implemented several programs designed to help new students understand and adapt to what faculty members refer to as "the Freeman Way." One of these programs is a 10-session WebQuest-based study skills program. This program is provided to students during the scheduled lunch/study period.

At DSFHS, students are expected to do well. There is a strong belief frequently expressed by the administrators and teachers that students will live up to expectations. Students are often encouraged to try and succeed, and they respond positively. This was noted frequently in conversations with students, who indicated that they understood the clear expectations in the school and were afforded significant levels of support to achieve them.

1. School Culture

It is clear that DSFHS embraces the culture of high expectations. First mentioned by the school's principal and often repeated by the staff, is the unofficial school motto: **"It's in the bricks."** Administration and staff members are proud of the DSFHS tradition and regularly remind the students of their role in upholding it. This process is intentional and is a frequent part of communications to students, in both large and small settings.

The school's mission states:

> The faculty and staff of Douglas Southall Freeman High School believe that it is important to create a variety of learning experiences to accommodate the diverse needs and interests of each student. In keeping with this philosophy, a continuous effort is made to provide an environment that nurtures and stimulates teaching, learning, and service. The school assumes an obligation to equip each student to take his/her place in a changing society as a well-adjusted, informed individual and as a productive citizen. The maintenance of the educational environment to fulfill these purposes is an obligation shared by staff, parents, student body, and community.

With its long history of excellence, DSFHS enjoys **strong support from members of the community**, many of whom have attended the school. This support is manifested in continued support for the school culture of high expectations and in an increased level of financial support. The principal cited numerous instances in which community fundraising has resulted in substantial improvements to the school's facilities.

The maintenance of the environment of high expectations and high achievement is supported by

a number of intentional organization patterns that have been incorporated into the school's schedule and daily life. To provide students with additional support time, students are provided with a longer lunch, which includes a study block of 22 minutes per day, during which time students are encouraged to seek additional academic support. Although voluntary in most cases, structure is added to this time block for students who have been identified as needing additional help. A **school Web site** lists a wide variety of SOL and study skill options for students.

The adults in the DSFHS school community have accepted the need to develop and maintain **strong, supportive relationships with students**. Exchanges between adults and students provide excellent examples of this commitment. Focus group interviews with students validate that they value and respect such relationships. Students feel safe and respected by adults. The school has been exceptionally successful in **integrating the influx of ESL and LEP students into the daily life of the school**. Students and staff indicated that there is little or no separation among various ethnic groups. Observations in the halls, classrooms, and cafeteria confirm this.

2. Core Academic Learning

DSFHS offers a strong and varied program of studies. As reported above, DSFHS students do exceptionally well on the state's large-scale assessment program. In 2006, 94 percent of DSFHS students scored at the proficient level on the English portion of the assessment, and the school has maintained at least a 92 percent proficiency rating over the past three years. In mathematics, DSFHS students also have performed well, scoring at 90 percent in the 2006 administration and exceeding 87 percent over the same three-year period. Both of these results exceed the state pass rates by at least 10 percent. Scores of DSFHS students in science and history are equally impressive and have been upheld.

DSFHS students also score well on national college readiness exams. DSFHS students have exceeded the state average in the verbal section of the SAT by 33 points and the national average by 42 points. In the mathematics section, DSFHS students have exceeded the state average score by 37 points and the national average by 32 points. PSAT scores for students at DSFHS exceed the state and national averages as well. DSFHS students, like all students in Henrico County, receive laptop computers to assist in their learning. Staff, students, and classroom observations verify that the technology provides a significant opportunity for students in all classes to extend their learning.

The school also offers an extensive range of programs for both exceptional and struggling students. Courses in core areas are offered at a variety of levels of challenge. Students are urged to attempt challenging content with the recommendation and support of their teachers. Special needs students are integrated into the full life of DSFHS. Students cited a number of ways in which regular education students support and engage the school's special needs population. An example of this is a **Big Brother, Big Sister program** developed to assist students in need of additional support. This program takes place during the daily homeroom period.

3. Stretch Learning

DSFHS has an extensive range of programs designed to provide students with experiences beyond the school's core program. These offerings have contributed to the strong reputation of the school and to its tradition of excellence.

In academic areas, for example, DSFHS offers a variety of programs at advanced and rigorous levels of instruction. The DSFHS Honors courses represent the focus of stretch learning experiences in core content areas. All advanced level courses require teacher recommendation for admittance. The principal and staff members explained that by requiring such recommendations, they have been able to maintain high levels of rigor and achievement. Parental overrides permit non-recommended students to participate in honors level and/or Advanced Placement courses.

The school houses the Center for Leadership, Government, and Global Studies, a center-based program that provides a rigorous academic curriculum to prepare its graduates to act as principle-centered leaders in their communities. Through advanced study of the social sciences, students are exposed to the complexities of political, social, and economic life. Through the Center's curriculum and associated experiences, they learn to analyze questions through multiple lenses and become increasingly aware of the ambiguities of modern life.

The Center now has approximately 190 students across four grade levels. Faculty members include the current Henrico County Public Schools' Teacher of the Year, the Central Region Economics Educator of the Year, a Fulbright award winner, a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Fellow, a R.E.B. award winner for teaching excellence, and two department chairpersons. The curriculum includes advanced coursework in the areas of leadership, economics, English, philosophy, history, and social sciences.

DSFHS offers equally extensive offerings for students in the area of co-curricular and extracurricular programming. The school's performing arts program has been recognized with state and regional awards. In a recent competition held in Tennessee, the DSFHS music program was recognized as follows:

- Concert Choir and Girls Ensemble – Excellent Rating
- Downbeats – Superior Rating
- Show Choir – Superior Rating
- Festival Choir – Superior Rating
- Concert Band – Superior Rating
- Wind Ensemble – Excellent Rating
- Jazz Band – Superior Rating
- Division Champion for Mixed Choir
- Concert Band – Division Champion for Concert Ensembles
- Choral and band programs – Grand Champion award for the entire festival

As noted, the school's athletic program has received numerous honors and has achieved a 65 percent win rate in all sports during the school's history. Success in these challenging programs is supported by an extensive system of faculty and organizational assistance.

4. Student Engagement

DSFHS students exhibit an exceptional connection to the adults in the schools. Student interviews and observation indicate that they have positive feelings toward the school, the staff, and their peers, and a strong sense of belonging. Students and staff emphasized the DSFHS "family" and the ways in which the school fosters **positive relationships between adults and students**, as well as among the students themselves.

Students appreciate that their teachers are willing to provide additional help at a variety of times and in a variety of ways. Teachers make themselves available before, during, and after school and have posted hours for additional support in each department. They reported this aided their ability and willingness to work up to the level of high expectations that have defined DSFHS. The principal and his team are highly visible in the school. They have created structures that promote opportunities for students to interact positively and that regularly monitor the tone of the school. The principal refers to "taking the school's temperature" regularly by gauging what he calls the "smile factor." Adults respond quickly to students who seem troubled. Students recognize and appreciate this caring approach and mentioned it as a major factor in their respect for the adults.

One initiative designed to establish positive relations between students and adults involves the matching of interested ninth-grade teachers with students identified as at-risk. As a result of this effort, students readily reported that each student can easily find an adult who will respond to their needs.

Student work is regularly reviewed and evidence of struggle is met with quick, planned responses from the school's staff. Facilities and schedules within the school day, as well as outside of normal school hours, are designed to promote access to support activities. These services include personal interaction, technology-based support, and credit-recovery programs.

5. Personal Skill Development

DSFHS has an extensive offering in areas of **co-curricular and extracurricular programming**. These programs enjoy a rich tradition in the community and offer a number of opportunities for students to gain experience in key areas of personal growth. More than 60 percent of Freeman students participate in such programs.

In addition to the school's highly regarded athletic teams, DSFHS students can select from activities in areas of academic competition, visual and performing arts, curricular and special interest clubs, a variety

of honor societies, and service organizations. In their interviews, students stressed the importance of these activities in the maintenance of the "Freeman Family" environment. They indicated that staff willingness to sponsor clubs and devote their free time to such programs were key factors in the positive relationships between DSFHS students and the school's adults.

The **"House That Freeman Built" project** represents an excellent example of ways in which DSFHS offers students opportunities for personal exploration. In 2005, two DSFHS students approached the school's principal with the proposal to become involved in the construction of a house for Habitat for Humanity. Students involved raised more than $50,000 in sponsorship funds and have been responsible for the completion of a Habitat House in the county. DSFHS was the first public high school in the country to build a Habitat for Humanity House. The house has been completed and will be donated to a local family.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

DSFHS has long been known for its strong academic tradition. There is a **culture of high expectations and a belief that students will perform up to expected levels of achievement**. This belief is reflected in the range of courses offered to students and the level of expectation within those courses. DSFHS approaches the issue of rigor by carefully assessing the student performance and matching course selections to previous levels of accomplishment. DSFHS emphasizes the value of honors-level courses and views Advanced Placement options as extensions of such programs, rather than as substitutes for them.

The strong reputation of Freeman throughout the division and state make the school an attractive destination for prospective teachers. Additionally, the school leadership team at DSFHS spends considerable effort to find, induct, and maintain quality instructional staff. The commitment to teacher quality is reflected in the quality of instruction that students experience. The availability of laptop computers for all students has created lessons rich in technology. Students and teachers regularly and seamlessly utilize technology in the teaching/learning process.

Staff and students agree that the availability of additional support for students is a key factor in the achievement of students and in their willingness to attempt rigorous courses. All faculty members provide help to students experiencing difficulty. Resources include an instructional support team, intervention programs consisting of group remediation/credit recovery programs, one-on-one tutorial assistance, and scheduled learning skill classes. Students may also be assigned to study skills classes for long-term help or for short-term interventions. Communication among staff members is exceptional.

Sharing of information about students, lessons, planning, results, and difficulties is the norm. The school leadership has facilitated this communication by

- scheduling common planning time
- requiring common assessments
- using technology to provide shared access to plans, lessons, and assessments
- making use of department leaders to coordinate the discussions and to reinforce their importance.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

DSFHS has achieved award-winning status by paying careful **attention to data**. All school reports reflect the connection between state and local standards and the results of assessments. School leaders and teachers use structured, common planning opportunities to focus on alignment issues. Faculty regularly review data and participate in decisions pertaining to the adjustment of curricular offerings to ensure that the school continues to reach and exceed stated benchmarks.

Administrators and teachers regularly collect and analyze data from a variety of sources. Progress toward school goals is benchmarked, using challenging standards. Progress is charted and is an integral part of the discussions within the school community.

Classroom observations reveal that teachers regularly use assessment data (both formal and informal) to adjust instruction. Observations about student performance are shared with students and efforts are made to ensure that students understand the reasons for the adjustments.

Teacher use of data is fundamental to decisions about individual and schoolwide professional growth options and programs. School leaders review data as a part of the process of establishing school goals and professional development programs.

The analysis of data is not relegated to academic performance. School leaders regularly gather data about student engagement, student participation, and the quality of adult-student and student-student relationships.

8. Transitions

The school provides a number of **traditional transition programs for eighth-grade students**. The use of the lunch/study block is an effective support structure for all students, including incoming ninth graders. The **10-session WebQuest-based study skill program** taught during the study block of the lunch/study period for students identified as likely to experience transitional problems was cited by students as highly valuable. This program is also available to other students as necessary.

The **student mentoring program** in which upper-class students are assigned to incoming freshmen, along with the homeroom teacher/advisement program, provides additional support for students new to the school. Both staff and students cited the high level of interaction as important in the identification of students experiencing academic and/or personal struggles. Students indicated that struggling learners are recognized quickly and the responses are immediate. In addition to the orientation programs for students and their parents, DSFHS students from various athletic and academic teams **visit the district middle school** to engage students and model and promote the atmosphere of high academic expectations they will encounter at the high school.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

It is clear that the culture of high expectations at DSFHS is directly related to the presence of an **active, committed, and caring leadership team**. All interviews with staff and students revealed a deep respect for the work and vision of the school's principal and his team. There is a history of strong **collaboration and support between the school and its community**. The principal works proactively to maintain and extend this relationship. New staff members are provided with direction in the fostering of such relationships.

The discussions concerning school improvement are inclusive. The principal schedules monthly coffee sessions for community members and assesses the needs of the school through conversations with all stakeholders. Students and staff mentioned the importance of the principal's role in facilitating discussions regarding the identification of concerns, areas for improvement, and the development of responses.

The principal indicated that the health of the school and the continuation of the levels of effort required to maintain the school's commitment to high expectations are directly related to the degree to which the staff and students feel valued. He is tireless in ensuring that staff members feel valued and respected. He is highly visible and uses his time in the halls and lunchroom to make sure students and staff members who seem troubled are immediately provided the opportunity to share issues that may be affecting them negatively.

The amount of time devoted to protecting the atmosphere of expectations and caring is extensive and obvious, as are the results. DSFHS students regularly expressed their confidence in the adults in the school and their sense of commitment to the success of each student, as well as their accessibility in time of need.

10. Professional Learning Community

A significant aspect of the continuation of the school's culture and its environment of high expectations is the level of **investment in the school's human resources**: its staff. There are opportunities for staff at all levels to explore and develop leadership skills. Staff members cited the openness of the school leaders to new ideas and their encouragement for staff members to plan and implement such proposals. Teachers are encouraged to explore and propose new ways of continuing the DSFHS tradition of high achievement.

Conversations with staff reveal a genuine appreciation for and commitment to the process of continuous learning and exploration. Expectations for professional discussions are high and it appears that the staff exert considerable peer pressure to encourage and support new staff members to become contributing participants in the school's mission. Mentoring and orientation-support programs help to carry the culture of high expectations to all.

New teachers are inducted into the system via a range of formal and informal activities. All new teachers participate in an introductory orientation and support program, known locally as **"DSFHS 101."** In this program, teachers are provided with information about the culture of the school, its atmosphere of high

expectations, the various procedures and policies, and discussions about the ways in which instruction can be tailored to support the rigorous expectations that are the norm at DSFHS. Teachers are encouraged to continue their learning activities and to share and model their experiences for students.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

Students and teachers alike noted the ready availability of support for students who are struggling, whether their problems are defined as long- or short-term. Students have access to specialized study skills sessions, which provide targeted support instruction to both special needs and non-classified students. Many of these interventions are mentioned in detail above.

In interview sessions, students identified the willingness of teachers to work with them on areas of difficulty and/or interest as a major strength of the school. Inclusion classes are an important part of the school's learning experiences for special needs students. Faculty and administrators have targeted additional training and refinement of these experiences as an area for continued attention.

Lessons Learned

- It is possible within a traditional school schedule to maintain a culture of high performance and a traditional organizational structure. It is not necessary to totally restructure a school.

- In contrast to many schools, DSFHS has been able to **integrate technology to positively impact instruction.** DSFHS has utilized open access to technology for all students, intensive training of staff members in the instructional uses of technology, and the inclusion of the use of technology in the evaluation of instruction as strategies to accomplish this seamless integration.

- DSFHS has demonstrated how traditional structures can effectively support an atmosphere of caring relationships and rigorous expectations.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. The principal believes that **cooperation and collaboration among faculty are paramount**. There is a strong sense of collegiality. Teachers share best practices and best lessons and support each other's special programs. Coaches share multi-talented athletes.

2. Our **mentoring program for new staff, "DSFHS – 101,"** provides new employees with the support they need to be successful during their first year. The history and culture of the school, policies and procedures, grading, reporting, managing student behavior, etc., are addressed in a timely manner. Each new employee is assigned a mentor.

3. **Student leadership is valued and nurtured.** Elected student leaders have specific duties to perform. They meet with the administrative team monthly and their opinions and assistance are solicited. Students are included in our broad-based problem-solving process.

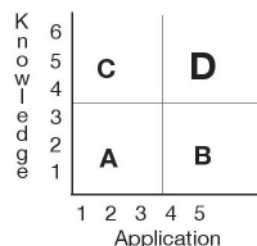# James River High School
Midlothian, Virginia
Chesterfield County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- high expectations and support
- data-driven decisions
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- shared decision making
- personalized learning
- rigorous and relevant curriculum
- student engagement

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	2,040
White	72%
Black	15.5%
Hispanic	6%
Asian	5%
Economically Disadvantaged	1.9%
English Language Learners	5%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	91%
Mathematics Pass Rate	89%
Graduation Rate	90%

Executive Summary

James River High School (JRHS) is located in Chesterfield County, a suburb of Richmond, Virginia. The community is ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. JRHS opened in September 1994 with 1,250 students. It currently has an enrollment of 2,100. The school offers a rich program of studies, including 20 Advanced Placement courses, 17 honors-level courses, and industry certifications through the school's career and technical education programs. JRHS houses one of two Chesterfield County English as a Second Language centers and has a Specialty Center for Leadership and International Relations. Both programs have enjoyed considerable success. JRHS is the only Chesterfield County high school to achieve National Blue Ribbon School status.

JRHS students have access to 40 athletic teams and nearly 50 clubs that provide students with exceptional opportunities to experience options beyond the school's academic offerings. These programs are accessed by the majority of JRHS students. More than 70 percent of students participate in one or more of these co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities.

James River students have consistently demonstrated excellent performance in a broad range of areas. In the Virginia *Standards of Learning* (SOL) assessments, James River students scored at or above the state pass rates for the past three years. Ninety-one percent of JRHS students have scored at or above the proficient level in English, 89 percent in mathematics, 93 percent in history and social science, and 90 percent in science. The Limited English Proficiency (LEP) pass rate for English was 64 percent in 2006, up from 42 percent from 2004. SAT scores have increased 19 points since 2002, with the scores of African-American students increasing an average of 48 points during that same time. In 2006, 28 percent of JRHS students were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. About 64 percent of JRHS students earn a Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma.

The statistics for JRHS are impressive, but they do not tell the whole story. JRHS is an exceptional school in many ways. This is a school that has turned itself around. The redirection of JRHS is a story of leadership success. Through a series of intentional and reasoned steps, the administrative team has brought the school to its current and well-deserved status.

JRHS is a place of exceptional student engagement, of high academic and personal expectations, thoughtful and reflective leadership, and exemplary professional commitment. Data, in a variety of forms, are used extensively to identify strengths, areas of concern, and solutions. At this academic institution, all stakeholders accept responsibility for modeling the kinds of expectations and behaviors that are defined in the school's motto, "Educating tomorrow's leaders." An atmosphere of respect, commitment, caring, and dedication is evident among the administrative team, faculty, and students.

1. School Culture

There is a palpable sense of energy that permeates every aspect of JRHS. It is an energy that exists at every level, and seems to live in the administration, faculty and staff, and students. While there is a synergistic relationship among all the members of the school community, the flow of energy that is the key to success in the school starts at the top with the principal. His tireless efforts are quickly pointed out by staff and students alike, and he serves as a strong model for the principles of character that make this such a remarkable school.

Even before entering the building, elements of the school's culture are obvious. There is a large plaque on the outside of the building near the main entrance that denotes the school's selection as a Blue Ribbon School in its first year of eligibility. The front hallways showcase inspiring artwork and plaques, and the theme of excellence reaches into classrooms, offices, and common areas.

However, things were not always this way at JRHS. Six years ago, JRHS was a school of concern. County officials noted the need for change and requested that the principal move to JRHS from his previous position in another county school to guide the recreation of a high school in need. The principal quickly implemented a series of steps that might be viewed as a form of case study for schools seeking direction for such a reinvention. These steps include

- the establishment of a clear **set of behavioral expectations for students and staff**
- the development of **school leadership teams** at administrative and teacher levels
- adherence to a **student-centered philosophy** in which decisions are made based on student needs rather than on adult concerns
- the creation of numerous **forums for discussion and decision making**, including
  - » monthly meetings during which the staff can raise any issues of concern
  - » community meetings with parents, neighborhoods, and/or community groups
  - » meetings with students to discuss the impact of school programs and hear their ideas about how to improve the school.

These steps focus on areas of student potential, change, lifelong learning, academics, balance, relevance, character and citizenship, parents and community, communication, technology, individuality, diversity, and the commitment to providing a safe environment for everyone. Members of the school are

bursting with pride and enthusiasm over the progress that has been made and the leadership that is helping them achieve at high levels.

Several programs reflect the culture and commitment to excellence at this school. One is the **Triple Prep program**, which is designed around the ideas of engagement, enrichment, and exposure, and meets the needs of an increasing at-risk population, regardless of the student's achievement level. Other special programs help students in a variety of content and related areas, such as SAT preparation, with sessions offered at times that work best for students, whether that is after school or on Saturdays.

No discussion of school culture at James River would be complete without mentioning the **candid environment.** There is openness to new ideas and to improvements of existing programs and practices. As one faculty member expressed it, "We don't have a sense of complacency; we are always looking ahead." New ideas are generated in a variety of ways, from monthly meetings in which the faculty is invited to informally drop by for cookies, coffee, and conversation with the principal, to house meetings set up by the PTA in which the principal visits homes in the community to talk with parents in an informal setting. When new ideas are generated, thoughtful consideration is given to how these ideas will affect the school now and in the future.

The mission of the school is **"to work in partnership** with students, families, and the community to ensure that each student acquires the knowledge, 21st-century skills, leadership experiences, and core values to achieve personal success and to enrich the community." Supporting this mission is a series of belief statements that further explain the role of various components of the school:

- **Potential:** We believe that all students can learn. Society benefits when individuals reach their full potential.
- **Change:** We live in a time of significant change with unique challenges and demands.
- **Lifelong learning:** Rapid technological and social changes necessitate continual learning.
- **Academics:** A quality education is still based on sound academic knowledge and principles.
- **Balance:** We recognize the importance of a well-rounded educational experience, including physical fitness and practical arts.
- **Relevance:** A curriculum should have relevance to the "real world."
- **Character and citizenship:** Positive character and citizenship development require an environment that fosters personal responsibility, integrity, and respect for all.
- **Parent and community:** Education is a shared responsibility that involves parents, the community, and the school. Parental involvement and support are important factors in a student's education.
- **Communication:** Communication is a critical component to foster and maintain cooperation and involvement among all groups with the school community.
- **Technology:** The need to compete in our global society requires the development of skills and an understanding of emerging technologies of our time.
- **Individuality:** We recognize the need for policies and procedures that provide for all students while respecting the uniqueness of each individual.
- **Diversity:** It is important to recognize and appreciate the contributions of the various groups within our diverse population.
- **Safe environment:** Students and staff require a safe environment that is conducive to learning.

2. Core Academic Learning

Students at JRHS respond successfully to the culture of high expectations. The school has consistently made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and also has been successful in meeting or exceeding expectations established for them through the Virginia *Standards of Learning* (SOL). A quick overview reveals that in 2006, 91 percent of students were successful at the advanced or proficient level in English, 87 percent in mathematics, 88 percent in science, and 91 percent in history and social science. In every case, this exceeded the pass rates for students at the division and the state level. In most cases, this is also true for students in each of the subgroup populations as well (no scores were reported for American Indian students due to the small population of students in that subgroup).

Although scores for the entire student body are impressive, the administration and staff at James River recognize that a **shift in the demographics of the student population** is occurring. With this shift comes the

recognition that the school must be proactive to ensure that programs, practices, and procedures are in place to keep up the level of student achievement. For example, a decision was recently made to **reduce the number of course levels in a variety of subjects**. Where there used to be both honors and AP courses, for example, there is now only an AP course. Another example of the school's response to changing demographics is JRHS's push to include **more minority students in more difficult courses**. Faculty members identify potentially successful minority students who can handle honors or AP courses. These students are encouraged to enroll and are offered a variety of safety nets so that they will have the needed services to succeed.

Faculty members value each other's contributions, including those who teach in non-SOL courses or content areas such as the visual and performing arts and career and technical education. The quality of programs available for the students of JRHS is reflected in the list of awards and areas recognized. A sampling of these includes

- National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, 2000
- Number one school library in the country, American Association of Libraries, 2002
- Virginia Honor Band (one of two in state to be named every year)
- Girls Field Hockey state champions, 2002
- Milken Educator Award recipient, 2006

3. Stretch Learning

The school's culture explicitly shows how all students are expected to achieve high standards of learning. This is not a school where it is easy for a student to fall through the cracks. Nearly 64 percent of the students at James River receive an Advanced Studies Diploma, and this compares favorably with other schools in the area. As more minority students are encouraged to enroll in challenging courses, this number is expected to rise. In just three years, there has been a **doubling of the number of students taking Advanced Placement test**s. Moreover, **enrollment in AP courses also has doubled**, to more than 28 percent. Finally, there is a **growing emphasis on dual-enrollment courses**.

In the 2007-08 school year, JRHS will implement an **Office of Academic Success for Diverse Students,** a distinctive center within the school that will be dedicated to ensuring every student is challenged at high levels. The office will have a committee of 10 to 12 teachers, administrators, and counselors, who will hold monthly meetings to consider issues such as teacher awareness, policy/procedures/practices, data/testing/grades, diversity training, and the disparity of achievement in academic levels. It is anticipated that the office will not only analyze the under-representation of African Americans and Hispanics in advanced and AP classes but also examine the over-representation of these minority groups in special education classes.

In departments, plans are in motion to make sure that some of the **most skilled teachers are teaching the neediest students**. This is a deliberate decision based on data and the commitment by faculty to ensure that all students are stretched to the limits of their learning experiences.

A key to stretch learning at JRHS is found not in scores and statistics, but in **relationships**. The goal of the administration and faculty is to know individual students so well that they can "capture" them, connect with them, and let them know that they are individually important and cared for. In this way, teachers and administrators know they also can come closer to making sure each student achieves at the highest possible level. This is a faculty that uses data to assess student progress on individual and group levels

Another important component of stretch learning at JRHS is the **Leadership Center**. This divisionwide magnet program is housed at James River and attracts many students. Courses in this program provide intensive project-based learning experiences, challenging content, and cross-curricular learning. Students take some of their courses as members of a cohort, and other courses are taken with the student body at large. These courses offer a demanding mix of challenging coursework designed to help students function as present and future leaders. Many of the school's clubs and the Center for Leadership have community service components as a part of member responsibilities. In the Leadership Academy, the service project is a part of each student's capstone experience.

4. Student Engagement

The key to student engagement is found at the top. Administration and staff go out of their way to make sure students know they are respected and valued. One student reported that when she moved to the JRHS

district from another school, teachers sought her out once a week for many weeks to make sure she was adjusting well. Another student talked about what happened when he began to get "apathetic." He noted that a faculty member "got on him" and "rehabilitated" him, and now he is taking AP classes. Faculty and students emphasized that a critical question posed to incoming students is, "What do you need to be successful?" Students cited this as one of many signs that adults are concerned about them not only as students, but also as people.

Classes offered outside of core academic subjects have proven to be an important way to engage students. Classes such as art and music are highly respected by everyone in the school. The school supports two full-time chorus teachers. Within career and technical education, the culinary arts program attracts a large group of students and provides an outlet for their passion and creativity in a way that ties them into the high school experience.

The administration and faculty are in a constant state of strategic flux, **adapting with the changing needs of the increasingly diverse student body**. There is a steady introduction of new programs and new tactics to increase student learning and achievement in an environment of trust built by both adults and students. For instance, a planned response to an anticipated increase in student enrollment is the move to one single lunch period. This was an idea that has been carefully researched and studied not just by the adults in the building but by students as well. The decision to implement was made after carefully considering how best to meet students' needs.

5. Personal Skill Development

The core values at JRHS are respect, responsibility, honesty, and accountability. These attributes guide the direction of the school and the individuals within it. Each value is explained in the student handbook and accompanied by a description of what it means to be a person with that value, followed by an example that shows what type of behavior is expected when that value is present.

Opportunities to develop individual skills are numerous at JRHS. At the Leadership Academy, students are required to participate in community service, as well as other key attributes of leadership development. The school offers a wide variety of clubs, making it easy for students to improve numerous skills and characteristics. In addition to nearly 50 clubs, there is a wide choice of athletic teams available to students. JRHS encourages students to be involved in a variety of nonacademic activities. Several students mentioned not only how important the established clubs were but also how supportive the school's faculty and administration were in responding to requests for a new club or the addition of a new sport. One student mentioned that JRHS is one of the only public schools in the area with a lacrosse team, and the reason the team exists is that students asked the administration about it, found support for it, and established it. This openness to new ideas is one of the important ways that students are allowed to exercise their freedom, their creativity, and their intellectual curiosity.

Whether it is the establishment of a new club, the addition of a new sport, the welcoming of a new student, or the interventions on behalf of a struggling student, the key to JRHS success is the deep sense of mission, vision, and commitment to the success of each individual student shared by everyone in the school. There is a **strong web of caring between the adults and the students** that binds members of the school together.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

JRHS has worked hard to increase the level of rigor for its students. Recently, the administrators and staff revised the school's offerings, collapsing an extensive structure of various course levels, including multiple levels of non-AP courses. The JRHS schedule now consists of three option levels: AP, non-AP, and special needs. Both adults and students reported significant increases in rigor and expectations as a result of these changes. By collapsing the previous number of offerings within courses, **students have been encouraged to attempt more challenging content.** The move to collapse course levels also has reduced the options in allowing students to navigate a less rigorous and/or challenging route through the school's program of studies. There are no school-imposed barriers to the students' selection of higher-level coursework. Teachers offer advice and counsel regarding the selection process, and students report that teachers consistently recommend that students attempt high-level courses. Extensive scaffolding opportunities provide students with the

confidence necessary to attempt such stretch learning opportunities.

In addition to raising expectations via the selection of more rigorous course content, JRHS staff members are working to increase the level of relevance within the students' learning experiences. In the areas of visual and performing arts, students not only participate in local performances but also travel to perform in state, regional, and national competitions and/or exhibits.

Conversations with the school's principal and members of the administrative team reveal that considerable time and energy are spent **recruiting, selecting, inducting, and retaining high-quality staff.** This process was described as one of the key factors in the turnaround of the school. The selection of staff, both teaching and administrative, was intentional and designed to support the goal of high expectations, professional responsibility, and the development of a caring, supportive environment for students.

Recently employed teachers reported that the school's interview process, which includes both administrative and teacher representatives, clearly defined expectations for new staff. These expectations included the commitment to quality instruction, as well as the commitment to devote time to support the success of students. Teachers emphasized that a key element in the development of the school's culture of high expectations and high staff involvement is the level of **professional respect** they enjoy. Teachers cited the ways in which they feel valued, appreciated, and respected as professionals by the school's administrators and by members of the community.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Data play an integral part in the decisions concerning James River programs. Both formal summative assessments and periodic formative assessments are used extensively to determine the progress of individual students, teacher performance, and program effectiveness. Data tools and technical support allow staff to identify student concerns as they relate to standards clusters for the state's SOL. The county has provided an **assessment support specialist** to the schools to assist in the administrative assessment process and the analysis of data from these assessments. Locally, students are evaluated via **team-developed common assessments, as well as teacher-designed individual class tests.**

Like a number of other school components at James River, data collection encompasses a far broader definition than is usually the case. In addition to using the results of the formal assessments conducted by the state, AP exams and SAT scores, and locally developed assessments, the staff make **extensive use of surveys and informal focus groups meetings**. The principal conducts monthly coffee and cookies meetings during which all staff members are invited to share their perspectives on current and planned programs. A similar program is conducted with equal frequency for students. Additionally, the principal meets regularly with parent groups in their homes. These parent meetings are planned to provide easy access to the principal regardless of where they live. Parents who might be reluctant to host such meetings are invited to the evening gatherings at the school.

Little is done at James River that has not been reviewed through the lens of data. As mentioned earlier, an analysis of course enrollments cross-referenced by demographics and ethnicity revealed a significant under-representation of minority students in AP courses. As a result of these findings, staff members organized discussion/planning groups to evaluate the reasons and to formulate a planned response.

8. Transitions

The JRHS staff has spent considerable time exploring the means by which they could increase the success rates of incoming freshmen. Although the principal had successfully implemented a freshman academy program at his previous school, the school culture at James River dictated a different approach. Because a part of the JRHS philosophy involves increasing the levels of student responsibility and opportunity whenever possible, the staff determined that a **student-to-student mentoring program** would have the best chance of increasing freshmen success levels and the amount of student-to-student interaction.

As a result, two years ago JRHS established a **ninth-grade mentoring program**. The mentoring program has two important components. First, upper-class students identified as candidates who would most benefit from the training and mentoring experiences were selected as mentors. Each mentor is assigned five freshmen and placed in a freshman homeroom class. Each class has between four and five mentors. The mentors meet formally with their freshmen students regularly at the beginning of the year and then each

month thereafter. Mentors are expected to contact their assigned freshmen on a regular basis and to offer assistance as needed. Interviews with both freshmen and their student mentors showed that this program is highly successful, as students named this program as a key factor in their successful transition to JRHS. As is typical with the exploration and implementation of new programs at JRHS, staff and student input were integral in problem analysis and program development.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

What makes JRHS an excellent selection as a school for this study is the way the transformation to "school of excellence" has occurred. A number of intentional steps have been taken, and these steps were made possible by the reflective and analytical approach used by the principal and his administrative team.

The current composition of the administrative team is relatively new, but it has made a definite impact on the staff and students. Teachers indicate that the principal always responds positively to suggestions and/ or expressions of concern. "The principal always has time to listen. Regardless of what he needs to get done, he makes the time to listen and respond," said one staff member, echoing the sentiments of other teachers interviewed.

Students also reported that their opinions are always respected and that the school's leaders responded positively to their requests. The existence of the school's extensive club structure, as mentioned above, directly illustrates how the principal and his team listen to the student body.

School leaders have clear expectations for staff and students alike. These points are communicated and modeled. Teachers reported that, beginning with the interview process and continuing during their time in the district, they never doubted what was expected of them. They also report feeling valued and respected. Professional help is available whenever needed. Teachers may seek assistance with assigned mentors, work with their department coordinators, participate in fixed induction programs, and elect staff development programs that address their concerns. Professional behavior is expected and facilitated.

The concept of **shared leadership** is an integral part of the school's culture and does not end with the adults. JRHS has an extensive program for student leadership. Student government is an active concept in this school, and the school's club organization has contributed significantly to the spirit of leadership and community.

10. Professional Learning Community

The commitment to professional growth at JRHS takes several forms. On the formal level, staff members at JRHS make frequent use of opportunities provided by the county. The county system offers an array of professional development courses. These include both traditional and online options. Additionally, there are a number of professional growth options available within the school, based on the staff and administrative identification of need.

The **commitment to professional learning** among JRHS faculty also extends well beyond formal learning communities. The JRHS staff makes **extensive use of technology** to share classroom resources and assessments. These resources are augmented by departmental discussions and content area subgroup collaborations. The JRHS staff is committed to providing quality experiences for their students. The nature of the school's culture, as well as the nature of the staff relationships, contributes to the frequency and quality of such informal professional learning experiences.

There are obvious norms for teacher behavior and clear expectations for maintaining high levels of instruction. Staff members cited the **open lines of communication** within the building as the primary means by which they can identify professional growth needs. Teachers new to the district indicated that seeking help and asking questions are a normal part of the culture and a normal part of their maturation process as teachers.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

JRHS's community exhibits an aggressive approach to the concept of student-centered learning. Staff members cited that such decisions are often uncomfortable, but are made acceptable by the way they are discussed and implemented. For example, the decision to restructure the school's lunch program that eliminates multiple lunch periods in favor of a common lunchtime has not received universal acceptance. It is clear, however, that

the decision has been based on the analysis of student benefit. Teachers described this process as "change with rationale."

The staff has identified the changing nature of the student body as a primary challenge to the continued success of the school's commitment to high expectations for all. Orientation programs for incoming JRHS students are based on students' responses to the question, "What would you need to be successful?" The school has a number of programs designed to provide support for students:

- **Triple Prep** is a program that blends engagement, enrichment, and exposure. The engagement component addresses the SOL remediation needs of students. The enrichment component addresses support for AP students. The exposure component seeks to expand student experiences beyond the first two components. Triple Prep time occurs throughout the school day as well as on Saturdays.

- **Student/Peer Mentor Program** is a program that trains upper-class students to serve as mentors to freshmen.

- **Staff composition** is a more subtle initiative in which JRHS administrators have consciously sought to add leadership personnel who have direct experience with under-resourced and/or minority populations.

- The teachers and administrative team members **expect all students to do well**. Students and staff reported that the discussion and daily focus of such expectations are instrumental in maintaining the commitment. When schools focus on rigorous and relevant instruction, it is critical that the school provides the support that allows students to achieve at the expected levels. The culture of caring relationships that characterizes JRHS creates a climate in which this support is a seamless part of the school's programming.

Lessons Learned
It is possible to significantly alter the culture of a school through deliberate action. At JRHS, this turnaround was facilitated by the leadership of a new principal, the creation of a cohesive team with the same agenda, and a commitment to retain those who accepted the vision, while releasing those who did not share the vision. The change in direction was accomplished by

- defining clear expectations for professionals and students
- relentlessly encouraging the achievement of these expectations
- listening to the voices of the staff and community
- respecting the staff and community
- reinforcing the successes and calling attention to areas of need
- introducing a culture of data.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. There is a **willingness to take risks for improvement.**

2. There is an **open and public dialogue in dealing with difficult issues**, e.g., substance abuse.

3. Leadership always means **considering the input provided by stakeholders**, i.e., students (Student Leadership Council), parents (neighborhood meetings), and department chairs (Advisory Committee).

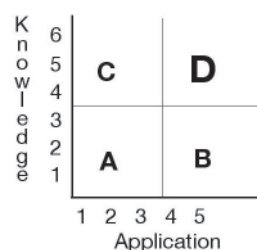# Princess Anne High School
Virginia Beach, Virginia
Virginia Beach City Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- comprehensive high school
- use of data for instruction
- collaborative instructional leadership
- block schedule
- focused professional development
- support for ninth grade
- personalization
- literacy

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	1,900
White	64%
Black	22%
Hispanic	5%
Asian	7%
Economically Disadvantaged	17%
English Language Learners	1%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	84%
Mathematics Pass Rate	85%
Graduation Rate	87%

Executive Summary

Princess Anne High School (Princess Anne) is the oldest high school in Virginia Beach. Opened in 1954, the school is one of 11 high schools in the district. In addition to serving regularly zoned students, the school hosts three city-wide centers: the West Building, for students with moderate to severe disabilities; the International Baccalaureate program; and a center for pregnant teenagers. The school features one of the oldest and most successful Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps programs in the country.

Princess Anne's mission-focused faculty and administration have a unity of purpose. Based on data

analyses, the school's leadership emphasizes a student-centered learning environment. The common focus of all staff serves the school well.

The school's culture and collaborative spirit have been shaped by a tragic fire that destroyed approximately one-third of the building in 1995, four days before the beginning of the school year. For almost two years, classes were held in a nearby vacant shopping mall. Buses transported students between the temporary location and portable classrooms on the main campus. The fire led to the development of a unique and creative block schedule that is still in place today. With no cafeteria at the shopping mall, the administration was forced to adjust most student schedules into three 90-minute blocks of instruction. Ten-minute intervals between blocks were scheduled to allow for snacks in the absence of lunch. This was the birth of the "Intensified Block" at Princess Anne High School.

The current schedule is not built around a traditional lunch bell. Efforts are made to schedule students with six classes into blocks 1, 2, and 3. The student then has the option, with parental permission, to leave the school building at 12:30 p.m. Students who wish to schedule seven, and even, eight courses have a 20-minute break prior to fourth block. Between half and two-thirds of the students choose to stay for fourth block for extra classes, tutoring help, athletic study hall, and computer lab.

Princess Anne students are 66 percent white, 18 percent African-American, 7 percent Asian, 5 percent Hispanic, and approximately 4 percent other ethnicities. Almost 25 percent of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch, and 15 percent of students are identified as having disabilities. The average daily attendance is 95 percent and the graduation rate is 87 percent. The school is fully accredited and has made AYP every year. Despite increasing poverty and diversity of the student body, student performance as measured by the Virginia *Standards of Learning* tests continues to increase.

1. School Culture

The principal describes the environment at Princess Anne High School: "We are in an old building, but it's not the building, it's the people." The people have created a culture that is warm, inviting, and characterized by high expectations. The expectations for the students are clear, visible throughout the building, and evident in materials provided to parents, students, and staff. One frequently used motto is, "A's and B's are in, D's and F's are out. Avoid all C's if you can."

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning, and teachers sign off on planning sheets created by students. Many students reported that they had deep respect and admiration for teachers. Teachers go out of their way to help students. Students emphasized the caring staff members and their willingness to provide extra help (even on weekends) as key elements in this high level of respect. Students said that teachers knew, understood, and cared for them, and, more importantly, students reported that they also had a personal connection with some teachers.

Teachers identified the sense of community that exists in the school. They are highly involved. Students noted that teachers regularly attend their extracurricular events and are readily available to assume sponsorship of clubs that have been suggested by students.

The school's purposeful use of data is a significant part of the culture. The collection, distribution, and analysis of data drive the decision-making processes. This extensive use of data has resulted in ongoing conversations about student performance. The school's culture is one of continuous improvement built around a well-organized, sophisticated, and comprehensive system of data collection, analysis, goal setting, and action planning.

This is a student-focused school with clear expectations and accountability measures for both adults and students. The culture is one of perseverance, consistency, commitment, and attention to detail, respect, collaboration, and caring. Every day and in every way, the staff and students work hard to get the little things right. This atmosphere seemed to be driven by the principal, who was deeply respected by staff and students.

Noteworthy in the school's culture is evidence that despite changing demographics, student performance continues to increase. Students and staff seemed happy, engaged, and optimistic. The school culture is embodied in its mission statement:

> The mission of Princess Anne High School, in cooperation with family and community, is to empower our diverse student population to meet the challenges of life through quality education and to instill a lifelong desire for continuous learning and improvement.

Princess Anne High School is committed to the following governing beliefs:

- Each student deserves excellent instructional programs, materials, teachers, support staff, and administrators.
- Effective student-teacher communication is essential in the overall development of students.
- Each student should have the opportunity to become a responsible citizen in the family, and in the local, national, and world communities.
- All children are entitled to a quality education in a safe, disciplined, clean, and caring environment.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Learning is enhanced when the parents, students, and community make the school a high priority.

2. Core Academic Learning

Princess Anne is unusual, even among other top-rated schools, because it offers to all students what many schools only make available to a few. Examples of this include the Kuder Interest Inventory and the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). The Kuder is part of the individualized personal plan developed for each Princess Anne student. The PSAT is used to screen for future programming options as well as being employed diagnostically to assist staff in developing meaningful support programs for individual students.

Princess Anne has been successful in meeting standards on the state's large-scale assessment tests. In reading and writing assessments, 93 percent of students have achieved proficiency. In mathematics, 91 percent of Princess Anne students have achieved proficiency. Students with low socioeconomic status have exceeded the division pass rates in English and mathematics. The performance of students with disabilities is also impressive. Princess Anne students with disabilities exceeded the division and the state pass rates. The inclusion program has been in place for almost 10 years, and greater numbers of special education students are given access to a richer, more comprehensive curriculum than in the past. Princess Anne High School has been the recipient of numerous awards including

- *Newsweek* magazine high school rankings of 143 in 2004; 209 in 2005, and 202 in 2006
- Ranking in the top 10 percent of International Baccalaureate (IB) schools in the world
- Blue Ribbon School
- Combined Music Program honors for excellence in band, chorus, and orchestra
- NJROTC national rankings
- Virginia High School League Sportsmanship and Integrity Awards in 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004, and 2005
- Forensics State Champions five times
- Twelve state championships, 41 regional championships, and 54 district championships in athletics during the past 12 years.

3. Stretch Learning

Princess Anne High School provides an excellent example of stretch learning opportunities. Options for students are extensive and varied, ranging from the **International Baccalaureate (IB)** program and **Advanced Placement (AP) opportunities** to the school's highly regarded NJROTC program. As an indication of the school's intention to provide such stretch opportunities, all students are encouraged to schedule at least one AP offering. A further indicator of the school's focus on offering such options is the use of the **intensified block schedule**.

Students take full advantage of these opportunities. The number of students who schedule AP courses has increased 21 percent over the past five years. In the last year, the number of African-American students scheduling at least one AP course has increased by 47 percent. The increases in AP participation exceed city, state, and national rates. Furthermore, students scheduling these challenging courses do well. More than 74 percent of students have earned a score of 3 or higher in each of the past five years. African-American students participating in the AP tests have seen the number of scores of 3 or higher rise 138 percent during this same time period.

Princess Anne IB students' scores exceed the city, state, and national averages. Of those in the IB

program, 96 percent have earned an IB diploma, exceeding the world average by at least 13 percent during the past five years. Furthermore, 94 percent of Princess Anne students have earned a score of 4 or higher on the IB exams, which also exceeded the state, North American, and world averages. To continue the school's success with the IB program, Princess Anne and its feeder middle school now offer the **Middle Years Program** to allow students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to participate successfully in the IB program or other advanced programs of their choice.

Students evidence strong approval of the school's stretch offerings in other program areas. The **visual and performing arts** enroll 40 percent of Princess Anne students in at least one course, and 20 percent of students have scheduled a **world language class** at level/year 4 or above. Princess Anne has 423 students involved in its gifted education program, and 86 percent of seniors go on to college. The school has increased its capacity and resources to facilitate the transition of students into postsecondary education. The **ACCESS College Foundation** is a nonprofit organization that has placed a counselor on the campus of Princess Anne High School. This staff member helps students plan for college and prepare for SAT testing and assists students with the application process and requests for financial aid.

There are no barriers to the rigorous core programs. Rather, the school relies on extensive support structures to ensure student success in these challenging learning experiences.

4. Student Engagement

Princess Anne High School is a school characterized by great student enthusiasm and engagement. It is a warm and welcoming place with strong **student/adult relationships**. Most teachers attend one or more student events after school or in the evening throughout the year. Programs for students are extensive, and students report that they are involved in multiple activities. Many report that it is this contact with their teachers that contributes to the depth of the relationships that are evident between students and adults.

Teachers regularly stay after school to help students. There are numerous opportunities for students to access support, both formal and informal. Some students reported that they needed to work hard so as not to disappoint their teachers. Teachers are approachable, and students feel comfortable reaching out for help.

Princess Anne is a model of robust and well-organized academic intervention services:

- *Block 4.* Scheduled as well as informal access times for students are available during the optional fourth block.
- *D/F Alert.* Teachers call home when students, especially freshmen, receive a D or F on a major assignment at nine-week grading periods.
- **Eighth grade at-risk students are identified**. As ninth graders, they receive additional support through tutoring, mentoring, reading classes, and SOL-improvement classes.

A number of students mentioned that the school's rich and varied **recognition programs** provide additional indicators of their importance to the adult members of the school community. The programs are extensive and seek to reach across traditional lines to recognize a wide variety of students. A sampling of these programs includes

- Shining Stars. Awarded for excellence in academics, sports, and community service (300 to 400 yearly).
- Senior of the Month. Leadership and outstanding service to the school, model of excellence.
- Good Cavalier of the Month. Awarded to deserving students, one per grade level, who might otherwise go unrecognized (good behavior, attitude, positive contributions).
- Student of the Quarter. Outstanding qualities of character, citizenship, service, leadership, and good behavior; one per grade level per quarter.
- Student Volunteer of the Quarter. Awarded to a student who devotes extraordinary amounts of time to volunteering within school.
- Birthday Pencils. On birthdays, the principal personally delivers a "magic" pencil to celebrating students and faculty.
- Cavalier Medallion. Ten to 15 graduating seniors receive this award for outstanding academic or athletic participation and good citizenship.

5. Personal Skill Development

Princess Anne does not make use of large-scale or formal character education programs within the school. The key to personal development of students rests in the depth and sincerity of personal relationships, which are such an integral part of the school's culture. Leadership, character development, and the promotion of good behavior are integrated within all school programs and activities. These activities are intentional and well organized.

School administration recognizes and encourages student personal growth. The principal starts each assembly, pep rally, and school program by reviewing expectations for student behavior. Daily announcements include messages of good character and behavior. The guidance department conducts **three- to eight-week programs throughout the year that emphasize leadership, time management, and organizational skills**. The **Cavalier@PA Behavior Campaign** recognizes good behavior, courtesy, and school pride. Students and staff agree that the presence and effectiveness of this program has contributed to the lowest incidence of disruptive behavior of any of the city's schools.

Students have many opportunities to develop leadership and other personal skills. In 2006, Princess Anne had 158 student delegates and 16 student staff members participate in the weekend-long **Virginia Beach Leadership Workshop**. This was the largest representation among all Virginia Beach schools. Approximately 18 percent of the student body holds at least one leadership role in clubs and/or athletics. The majority of school clubs, including the Student Leadership Association, have **community service** components. The IB Middle Years Program participants and IB diploma students exceeded their program requirements for community service.

Schoolwide, Princess Anne sponsors an extensive variety of charitable projects that have allowed students to participate and raise substantial amounts of money for community causes. The **ABCs of Diversity @ PA**, a new program that is well received by students, is designed to promote tolerance, acceptance, motivation, and education about diversity.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

Princess Anne High School has a **comprehensive district curriculum closely aligned with the Virginia *Standards of Learning***. **Pacing guides** have been developed for SOL courses. Both the IB and AP programs have well-developed, comprehensive curriculum for all courses. This approach has been followed in the development of the IB Middle Years Program and the AP/IB orientation/preparation program.

There has been significant **professional development about teaching in a block schedule**. All classes observed used a variety of instructional strategies. Lesson plans suggest that teachers vary activities every 20 to 30 minutes within the block. Teachers use time effectively. There did not appear to be any downtime at the end of a period or students given the opportunity to start homework.

Personalization and relationship building are priorities. The rigor of the programs has been increased, and an extensive effort has been made toward stronger application or relevance in the daily instructional lessons. Many students reported that their teachers really care and take the time to explain how learning will be used in the future. The increasing diversity of the student body is viewed as a strength rather than as a challenge. Teachers express the view that "our students will," *not* "our students can't."

A **strong focus on literacy** is found within the school. The reading teacher reported that all staff members were receptive to training provided on reading in the content area. Student difficulties in reading are dealt with immediately through teacher intervention and tutoring commitments as well as programmatically through the use of the reading support program. There has been a focus on **differentiating instruction**. Some teachers reported that the IB program has had a positive impact on other courses by increasing expectations. Teaching strategies used in IB and AP courses were being incorporated in other courses. This is facilitated when teachers are scheduled for both IB/AP and SOL core courses. Although these approaches are not pervasive, they are part of the intentional, purposeful responses that characterize Princess Anne.

Teachers are knowledgeable and well versed in course content. All seem passionate about their discipline, a commitment which was reflected in their delivery of the content. They are also intentional about their collegial collaboration aimed at increasing **cross-curricular integration of courses**. Teachers reported frequent planned discussions that facilitate such integration.

Finally, there is a significant **distance learning** offering within the school, and Princess Anne students will soon have access to virtual courses being organized at the district level.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Use of data is by far the school's greatest area of strength. Research has validated that schools characterized by high expectations and high achievement are frequently those that utilize data in a variety of ways to inform their programs and approaches. Princess Anne is an excellent example of the incorporation of data into the school's culture. It is a "data rich" school. Many examples illustrate the use of data in intentional ways to guide the direction of the school:

- For the past decade, the school has used data to set goals for improvement.
- A School Planning Council, which includes parents, staff, and students, reviews student data in a variety of forms throughout the year.
- School Action Teams, with teacher members, review data on a quarterly basis.
- The PSAT is administered to the entire school population so that results can be used diagnostically to identify schoolwide needs.
- Each year, during the five pre-service days before the opening of school, faculty and administrators conduct a comprehensive analysis of student performance data in all areas. Using a specific process, the school develops goals and benchmarks for the coming year. Teachers then develop objectives and action plans to improve classroom instruction and student performance. Progress is monitored every nine weeks.
- Data are disaggregated by subgroup and by teacher.
- The way in which data are used results in the development of a common agenda understood by students, faculty, administration, and community. Students report always knowing where they stand. They receive constant feedback.
- The school is committed to eliminating the gaps in achievement found with under-performing subgroups. All school assessment results are disaggregated and are used to identify needs and develop responses.
- Princess Anne has developed an array of formalized procedures and materials to ensure that the approaches to data review and analysis are both reflective and consistent. This approach has directed and supported the staff's acceptance and integrated use of data as a part of their planning.

More than most other schools, the leaders of Princess Anne have created a culture in which areas of interest or concern are identified, data about these areas are collected, and the results are used to guide discussions about progress and/or next steps.

8. Transitions

Princess Anne High School has brought the issue of transition into sharp focus. Recognizing that times of transition are critical to student success, staff identified ninth-grade failures as a symptom of need. In response to this need, school leaders and staff developed a four-point program of action, called **Fresh Start. It is aimed at reducing ninth-grade failures** by

- conducting a parent orientation in May describing the school's atmosphere of high expectations
- holding a school information session for eight graders in June, busing them from their middle school during the school day
- providing a summer student orientation program in which incoming ninth graders attend seminars addressing study skills, success strategies, and so forth (these student-run sessions last approximately 25 minutes)
- conducting a summer parent orientation evening program to provide an overview of student expectations, student schedules, and tours.

Additional transition support is provided via

- offering **"Camp PA," a three- or four-day program for students identified as at-risk by middle school teachers and SOL test scores**

- making available in August a **ninth-grade study skills course**, run by a private nonprofit agency, for parents who wish to enroll their students
- assigning mentors to potentially at-risk ninth graders
- providing at-risk freshmen with SOL tutoring, reading classes, and other special assistance as needed
- offering a mandatory tutoring block for students with poor SOL performance or poor math and English scores in middle school.

Ensuring success for ninth graders is a vital component of the organizational structure. Several additional activities have been put in place to ease the transition to high school. The **high school principal meets with feeder middle and elementary school principals once each month**. Fifth-grade students visit the high school every year.

Princess Anne also pays careful **attention to the transition of its students from high school** to postsecondary experiences. The school hosts a regional nonprofit program known as ACCESS to assist students with postsecondary planning, including the completion of applications for college admission and financial aid. Students referred to the ACCESS program see this as another example of how they are cared for by the adults in the school community.

Each senior is expected to leave Princess Anne with a **postsecondary plan**. Students report that the process of developing their plans is intentional and relentless. Adults work carefully and thoughtfully to encourage students to connect their Princess Anne experience to experiences beyond the school.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

It is clear that Princess Anne High School is a reflection of the vision of its principal. The principal provides clear, consistent, and visionary leadership. This is a principal-led school, not a principal-dominated school. She has created a common vision and works hard to provide her colleagues with the resources they need to accomplish all objectives.

A system of **strong collaborative leadership** is firmly in place at the school. The principal holds regular meetings with staff and students to create a school that invites student ownership and participation. Students and staff alike concur that the respect and sense of value accorded to them is a critical reason for their willingness to extend themselves in pursuit of the high achievement that is so pervasive at Princess Anne.

The leadership style of the principal has resulted in the empowerment of passionate assistant administrators, a quality group of dedicated guidance counselors, and a teaching and support staff committed to each student. Every educator understands that he or she is a leader, and leadership opportunities are available every time a new challenge is presented. Students frequently note the sense of respect that they are shown by the school's leadership team. They report that this has encouraged them to take personal responsibility for their learning and for the well-being of others in the school.

Teachers support one another in the development of materials, resources, and lesson activities. The school's philosophy fosters interactions among teachers. Teachers believe that there is a need to support each other in a positive, collegial atmosphere.

Without exception, discussions with teachers revealed a clear understanding of the school's mission as well as an unflinching commitment to it. Their level of participation in the analysis of data used to define school goals and their role in the planning process undoubtedly have been formative in the development of this common view of the school's direction. Staff members frequently mentioned their commitment to the concept that "there is no such thing as good enough."

10. Professional Learning Community

Professional development is purposeful at Princess Anne and is aligned to school improvement priorities. The teachers mentioned that the principal and members of her team are respectful of their time and plan their meetings efficiently. They repeated that this is not a *status quo* school. There are **high expectations for the staff as well as for the students, and there are significant opportunities available for professional development to help meet these expectations**.

There is a **strong sense of collaboration** at Princess Anne. Staff members have created common assessments, and share notes, plans, and effective practices. Instructional resources are available via a shared drive on the school's technology network.

Staff members at Princess Anne have been encouraged to establish their own professional learning communities based on self-identified needs. The work in these learning groups has been identified as causal in attempts to make the school more challenging and responsive to 21st century needs.

The school's use of data creates numerous opportunities for faculty to reflect on and discuss student learning and performance. The staff and school leaders describe Princess Anne as a "backwards design" school: a school where programs are designed with the end (student performance) in mind. Well-organized action plans are developed based on the school's improvement priorities and form the basis of professional development throughout the year.

A clear focus on instruction is pervasive. Teachers have received training in topics such as differentiated instruction, reading in the content area, and understanding by design. Teachers are required to conduct **two peer observations per year**, one within their department and one outside their department. The staff views these cross-discipline observations of colleagues as an integral part of professional learning. Faculty members are expected to present information from workshops and conferences they attend to their colleagues.

Technology is being used effectively to promote a professional learning community within the school. Students and teachers use Share Point, further promoting online collaboration, communication, and sharing of assignments. Soon, parents will have access to student grades online through Share Point.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

To create and maintain the environment of high expectations for both academic and personal performance, the staff and leaders at Princess Anne High School have recognized the need for rich support programs to ensure student success. The use of data was again the strong point of the school's efforts to address the needs of struggling learners. They have a system in place to identify students who are at-risk and a series of voluntary and required intervention strategies to help meet their needs. These include rich mentoring options available for both incoming students and for students who will benefit from additional support. Students who have been paired with mentors, as well as student mentors themselves, expressed the benefits they have received from this program. Students identified as at risk of poor performance on state assessments are offered intensive preparation experiences, designed to help them succeed on the state assessments and, additionally, equip them to attempt more challenging course work.

Princess Anne has **several tutorial options for struggling students**. Once identified and/or self-referred, these students can be scheduled for formal blocks of time to work with adult tutors and/or **student tutors through the National Honor Society's service program**. The school schedule encourages students to utilize the **voluntary fourth block of the school day to schedule support options**. Block 4 has a high participation rate.

The school's **partnership with local youth shelters provides classes in anger management, time management, and crisis intervention** and allows access to related programs for select students as well.

Princess Anne has successfully implemented a support program for struggling readers. In addition, the school employs a full-time reading specialist.

Illustrative of its commitment to student success, Princess Anne's leadership and staff recognize the special needs of minority populations. Although scores on state and national tests are extremely good, there remains a gap in achievement between the white and minority students in the school. To support the increases in performance required to close these gaps, the staff has applied its data-based analysis and decision-making model to the problem. This analysis has resulted in the following steps:

- Disaggregate data from all assessments (SOL, PSAT, AP, IB), grades, and surveys.
- Complete a gap analysis in each of these areas.
- Implement tutorial programs.
- Implement a revised transition program.
- Create the CAVS Club (Caring About Valued Students), a support plan aimed at providing nurturing relationships for minority students.
- Create a one-to-one adult/student relationship for selected students.
- Provide professional development on diversity topics and issues.
- Facilitate discussions about diversity.

- Increase tolerance behaviors via the **ABC's of Diversity** program.
- Recycle the data gathering and analysis process continually.

While it is obvious to the leadership and staff at Princess Anne that the support of struggling learners will be an ongoing process and that current programs have not yet resolved the issues, there is a strong commitment to the use of "PA Strategies" (collect, analyze, use data) to increase the probability of success.

Lessons Learned

- Princess Anne is a school that has utilized data and the reflective use of information as the cornerstones of its improvement efforts. The staff and leaders of the school have, at the same time, nurtured and maintained an **environment of caring and meaningful relationships** between students and adults and among diverse students. They have done this intentionally and purposefully. They have created a climate in which **data are used to find both strengths and weaknesses and to craft responses** that have been designed to be respectful and clear.

- Some students interviewed had not had a smooth start to their school careers. They identified without exception the caring individuals they encountered and the rich opportunities to get to know and be known by others as critical to their current success.

- Princess Anne provides an excellent example of how a school can create and maintain an environment of, and commitment to, high expectations by providing extensive support opportunities that underpin the belief that students can and will succeed.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. Our long history of **using data to drive decisions** has resulted in our strong student performance. All stakeholders routinely use data to support plans and test achievement of our goals. We willingly acknowledge opportunities for improvement.

2. The multi-faceted **ninth-grade transition program** starts freshmen off with a sense of confidence about themselves and with trust and respect for the staff. Students and teachers become a team working collaboratively to meet high expectations. Inclusion of upperclassmen in transition activities strengthens the school community.

3. Staff members eagerly take part in the **rich professional development program** available to them. They go above and beyond in increasing their knowledge and skills, and the results of their efforts are clearly reflected in student achievement.

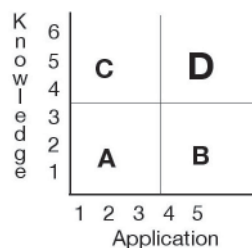# Randolph-Henry High School
Charlotte Court House, Virginia
Charlotte County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- student engagement
- culture of high expectations
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- rigor and relevance
- personal skill development
- CTE integration

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	693
White	61%
Black	37%
Hispanic	2%
Asian	0%
Economically Disadvantaged	70%
English Language Learners	0%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	99%
Mathematics Pass Rate	91%
Graduation Rate	79%

Executive Summary

Randolph-Henry High School (RHHS) is a comprehensive school located in Charlotte County, Virginia. Originally constructed in 1939, it is the only high school serving the approximately 13,000 residents living in the county. Charlotte County is a rural, agricultural community.

Randolph-Henry shares a site with the district's middle school, Central Middle School. The proximity of the two schools has resulted in extended opportunities for collaboration and transitional planning. This is a distinct advantage and leads to fewer transitional problems.

The school uses a 4 x 4 block schedule, with a standard 180-day calendar for its students. Students have

experienced this form of scheduling in the division's middle school and, subsequently, experience no apparent difficulties with the transition from middle to high school. RHHS provides a variety of course offerings through the local community college and via the state's distance learning network. These offerings provide for students at all levels, and all students are encouraged to take more rigorous course options. Prerequisites for such offerings are minimal, and students report that they are encouraged to stretch themselves by scheduling higher-level courses.

More than 50 percent of RHHS students participate in at least one club. More than 50 percent also participate in at least one sport. Students cite the availability of such opportunities as a major strength of the school.

RHHS is committed to being the best school it can possibly be by maintaining a tradition of high academics, student success, and rich extracurricular programs. To accomplish this, RHHS has created a learning atmosphere characterized by high expectations for academics, extracurricular participation, and behavior. The leadership of the principal, as well as the engagement of the staff and students, has contributed to the success of the school. The school strives to achieve far more than the minimum proficiency levels. Consistent with this goal, the majority of students earn more than the credit minimums for each state-approved diploma. The school has developed a proud tradition of academic excellence to rival its traditionally high level of athletic performance.

RHHS offers a rich range of opportunities for area students. These include strong academic programs, dual-enrollment and distance learning programs, strong business and technical options, and extensive co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities. Students take full advantage of these options, and levels of student participation are exceptionally high.

Students are cared for, accepted, and well behaved at RHHS. The school has achieved its numerous successes without reliance on programmatic solutions. Instead, the key elements of rigor and relevance seem to reside in the creation and maintenance of the atmosphere in which teachers and administrators refuse to let students fail. It is clear, moreover, that a collegial and caring climate, an environment of high expectations, a strong system of student support and strong leadership have resulted in an exceptional experience for adults and students alike.

1. School Culture

The administration and staff of RHHS have high expectations for their students, and students accept and understand these expectations. There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere at the school. The **administrators and staff are highly visible**. They gently, but effectively, reinforce expectations for behavior, dress, and values. A newly instituted **Take 10 period at the beginning of each day** provides an advisory opportunity in which teachers and students who may not normally be together during the school day interact. Topics relating to personal growth and development are presented to all students during this time.

The mission of the school is to prepare its students to be responsible, knowledgeable, and productive members of families, communities, and society as a whole. They further believe the school and community should work together to offer a wide range of academic and career and technical education courses, as well as activities that are designed to foster social and democratic values, develop personal dignity, and promote lifelong inquiry. The schools goals are to

- assist students in developing a positive self-concept and in recognizing and accepting their potentials and limitations
- assist students in acquiring competence in fundamental skills and basic knowledge to meet the demands of society
- encourage students in developing the values and skills that promote responsibility for academic success, community involvement, and personal achievement
- provide instructional programs commensurate with students' needs, abilities, and interests
- assist each student in developing personal standards of ethical behavior and moral choice
- increase knowledge and appreciation of the cultural, social, and historical backgrounds of all people
- instill in each student a respect for his/her heritage and to provide the opportunities for participation in the democratic process

- develop students' understanding of the role of constituted authority within the school, community, and nation
- provide a variety of cultural educational experiences that encourage choices in accordance with his/her needs and abilities.

Students and adults alike have internalized the **commitment to excellence and high standards**. Students report an **atmosphere of mutual respect and support**. Staff members demonstrate acute awareness of the needs of individual students. Conferencing and support services reinforce this. Teachers assume responsibility for all students, regardless of whether they have classroom responsibilities for them.

The Randolph-Henry school community has focused significant attention on the success of students at all levels: challenging less-engaged students through the creation of high-minimum course requirements, extensive support services, and attention to the diversity of learner needs. **Transition programs** (summer transition project and "Take 10" daily schedule), **character education** (staff commitment to educating the whole student), **hands-on rigorous and relevant programming** (Statesman Computer Company and Land Lab outdoor agriculture program, and Technology Center certification programs), rich dual-enrollment opportunities and **distance learning** options (courses in Latin and Chinese), and high levels of individual attention contribute significantly to higher-than-normal levels of student engagement and personal skill development.

The school leaders have created an environment of professional commitment and collaboration. Professional learning is directly related to school needs as defined by comprehensive data-collection efforts. It is clear that the adults at RHHS have accepted the need to develop and maintain strong, supportive relationships with students. Exchanges between adults and students provide excellent examples of this commitment. Focus group interviews with students validate that they value and respect such relationships. Students feel safe and respected by adults.

2. Core Academic Learning

Students met the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements and have exceeded the state pass rates in the mandated test areas of reading, mathematics, writing, and science. Students have sustained this performance for the past three years. There are no subgroups that have failed to meet AYP.

RHHS has accumulated awards that reflect the breadth and excellence of experiences offered to its students. These include

- Wachovia Stay-in-the-Game Award Winner, 2007
- *Redbook Magazine*, "One of America's Best Schools Award Winner," 2007
- Charlotte County Public Schools – "One of VA's Top Sixteen School Divisions," 2007
- State Champions – Golf, 2005
- State Champions – Baseball, 2002
- State Champions – Baseball, 2005
- State Champions – Forensics, 2004

3. Stretch Learning

Although RHHS has fewer than 700 students, the variety of courses offered to students has not been diminished. Because of the commitment to each student, school leaders have developed a number of creative ways to provide students with access to challenging and unusual opportunities. School leaders ensure that every student will participate in a strong core program and have opportunities for challenging stretch learning experiences.

Programs of note at RHHS, which provide excellent examples of the school's commitment to stretch learning, include

- Statesman Computer Program
- Land Laboratory
- online learning opportunities in Chinese and Latin

- dual enrollment
- Virginia Governor's School.

Excellent examples of rigorous and relevant opportunities available to RHHS students include two unusual and highly successful programs. The first is the **Statesman Computer Program**, through which RHHS offers its students experiences in computer technology/engineering. Students in these classes have the opportunity to gain industry certification while learning how to build and service state-of-the art computers. A part of the program provides RHHS students with the chance to be a part of the school's Statesman Computer business, which builds, sells, and services computers to the school and to members of the community. The students understand the relevant nature of this program and its opportunities. The second program is the **Land Laboratory**. This program serves as the school's agriculture program and includes a multi-acre facility used to provide learning experiences in farming, raising and selling cattle and horses, and participating in an extensive aquaculture project in which students raise fish and sell them to members of the community.

In an excellent example of curricular integration, teachers from the RHHS English department collaborate with teachers in the school's agriculture program to prepare and support students in their regional/national writing and speaking competitions. These highly effective and popular programs provide students with rigorous and relevant experiences in key areas of interest and need to the local communities.

4. Student Engagement

Randolph-Henry students exhibit an exceptional connection to the adults in the schools. Student interviews and observations indicate that they have positive feelings toward the school, the staff, and their peers, and have a strong sense of belonging. Much of this connection relates to the efforts made by the school leaders and staff to enhance the quality of student experiences through their willingness to extend their work to include significant participation in student clubs and extracurricular programs.

More than 60 percent of students participate in some form of additional programming. Students regularly cited the ease with which they can initiate new club experiences. Since the formation of such clubs depends on the availability of staff sponsorship and the willingness of the students to commit to some form of community outreach activity as their "cost" for participation, the number of students involved in these clubs clearly shows the high level of engagement of both students and staff.

Administrators and the staff of RHHS take seriously the responsibility for ensuring positive student/adult relationships. In reviewing data that indicated a decline in engagement by incoming ninth graders, the staff identified the need to create a ninth-grade transition program for students identified as potentially at-risk. Upon completion of the first year's program, the staff identified that all students would benefit from additional adult connections and students would benefit from opportunities to connect with peers with whom they might not be scheduled in classes. As a result, the school's **Take 10 program** was instituted. This program

- groups students in small "family" settings
- brings together students with a small number of staff members who are deeply committed to meeting the needs of this age group
- schedules smaller groups of students together for a 10-minute period at the beginning of each school day
- identifies teacher advisory responsibilities
- identifies target core belief topics for discussion each month.

5. Personal Skill Development

Structured opportunities for character development are stressed. Significant time is devoted in the school's transitional programming to topics of integrity, perseverance, hard work, and interpersonal relationships. In the school's Take 10 program, time is provided on a daily basis for discussions of key personal skills. Major topics are designated for month-long attention. School leaders and staff devote considerable time and energy to the presentation and the reinforcement of these issues.

As the center of many activities in the community, RHHS offers a **wide array of clubs and extracurricular programs** for its students. These clubs and programs provide extensive opportunities for leadership development and the development of personal strengths and interests. Students make extensive

use of these offerings and frequently cite the availability of staff members to support their interests as a critical factor in the development of strong relationships and the atmosphere of nurturing support. Despite the diversity that characterizes the school, students indicated that cliques and separation were not issues at RHHS.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

The RHHS experience with rigor and relevance is a journey. The journey began with the establishment of high expectations for student behavior and the transfer of these expectations to classroom instruction. Students are encouraged to perform at the level of the school's expectations and to contribute to the positive reputation, which RHHS enjoys in the region and state. This sense of expectations is a part of the faculty culture as well.

Given the relatively small size of the school, the school's leaders work hard to ensure a wide range of offerings to the RHHS students. The **use of distance learning and online options** has helped to expand these offerings. **Conversations with the local middle school staff** have become a part of the curricular planning process. This articulation has helped in the identification of at-risk students, the determination of needs for SOL success, and the development of the school's culture of high expectations.

Teachers use planning time to create meaningful, **interdisciplinary units of instruction**. As these are developed, the teachers introduce increased rigor and make efforts to connect the lessons to relevant life experiences. This part of the program is in its early stages but is intentional and organized for long-term success. The strongest examples of this approach involved the **CTE/English collaboration**.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

School leaders make **extensive use of data** from the state's large-scale assessments to inform decisions about school improvement and program needs. School reports reflect the connection between state and local standards and the results of assessments. District leaders, school leaders, and teachers have helped define school goals and priorities. Faculty regularly review data and participate in decisions pertaining to the adjustment of curricular offerings to ensure that the school continues to reach and exceed stated benchmarks.

Data are used to highlight any gaps that exist between student performance and district benchmarks. All applicable subgroups are analyzed to assess necessary instructional responses to underperformance. Additionally, school-improvement plans are developed in relation to the analysis of student performance data.

Classroom observations reveal that teachers regularly use assessment data (both formal and informal) to adjust instruction. Observations about student performance are shared with students, and efforts are made to ensure that students understand the reasons for the adjustments. This extensive use of student performance data ensures that students experiencing difficulty are quickly identified and matched with appropriate support options.

Teacher use of data is fundamental to decisions about individual and schoolwide professional growth options and programs. School leaders review data as a part of the process of establishing goals and professional development programs. School leaders and teachers collaboratively review class data to establish personal growth plans for staff.

Analysis of data is not relegated to academic performance. School leaders regularly gather data about student engagement, student participation, and the quality of adult-student and student-student relationships.

8. Transitions

This school has paid special attention to the importance and impact of sound transition programs. There is close coordination between the district's middle school and the high school. RHHS shares a campus with the division's middle school, Central Middle School. The proximity of the two schools allows and encourages middle level students to experience programs in the high school building and to become familiar with its layout, reducing anxiety frequently associated with such building changes. The high school uses the same 4 x 4 block schedule as the middle school, with a standard 180-day calendar for its students. Student interviews cited this as a distinct advantage and reported minimal transitional problems.

In discussions with middle school administrators, the RHHS school leaders recognized the need to further support potentially struggling students. They have responded with the development of a **summer freshman academy** program aimed at providing study skill support, orientation, and experience with RHHS's culture of high expectations. Because of the size of the school, the proximity of the middle school, and the

caring "family" atmosphere of RHHS, there appears to be a reduced need for structured, formal transition programs as they exist in larger, more impersonal schools.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

Randolph-Henry High School's success is directly related to the presence of a committed, creative, and visionary leadership team. All interviews with staff and students reveal a deep respect for the work and vision of the school's principal. Recent additions to the administrative team have increased the strength of the group. Each administrator is focused on specific areas of responsibility, but also shares in the ownership of other aspects of the school's environment.

Efforts to develop new leaders appear to be an integral part of the school's plans to ensure the continuation of the school's culture and future growth.

The presence of administrators at school functions was frequently cited by the students as reasons for the positive relationships that exist in the school and the students' willingness to abide by the school's firm code of conduct. Signs depicting the school's vision and mission are prominently displayed. Teachers participate in planning professional development activities.

10. Professional Learning Community

A significant aspect of the continuation of the school's culture and its environment of high expectations is the level of investment in the school's human resources: its staff. Clearly, there are opportunities for staff at all levels to participate in the continued development of the school.

Conversations with staff reveal a genuine appreciation for and commitment to the process of **continuous learning and exploration**. Expectations for professional discussions are high, and the staff exert considerable peer pressure to encourage and support new staff members to become contributing participants in the school's mission. **Mentoring and induction support programs** help to carry the culture of high expectations to all. Teachers are encouraged to continue their learning activities and to share and model their experiences for students.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

RHHS offers a variety of support options for its students. The newly implemented freshman summer academy provides a foundation for students before they require extensive support services. Without question, however, the primary source of support for students is the strong commitment of every teacher to the success of their students. Students regularly mentioned the willingness of staff members to extend themselves on their free time as a primary factor in their success in challenging course work, as well as in their willingness to attempt such courses. It is clear from the school's achievement data that the instructional experiences of the students are appropriate and effective. It is equally clear that the **support systems in place** at RHHS have contributed heavily to such results.

Lessons Learned

- Schools that successfully incorporate the values, needs, and interests of their community enjoy exceptional levels of support within those communities. RHHS has intentionally **responded to the needs of the community** in the development and expansion of its programs in technology, agriculture, and postsecondary preparation.

- **Career and technical education programs provide rich examples of rigorous and relevant programming**. These programs should serve as models for academic programs struggling to introduce relevance into their instruction.

- By treating **each student fairly and according to the same set of rules**, it is possible to make race a non-issue in schools with increasing percentages of minority students.

- **Extensive offerings in the extracurricular areas** provide schools with rich opportunities to increase student engagement and improve the relationships between students and adults.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. We have an **experienced and caring faculty** and staff. Our teachers have a great deal of experience dealing with students of varying ability levels. They work well together and maintain an orderly environment that is conducive to learning.

2. We have a **great deal of community support**. People in our community support our school, whether through extracurricular activities or academics. We have community leaders who speak to our students and motivate them to be successful.

3. The **personal relationships formed between the students and the adults** in our school are special. We are like a family.

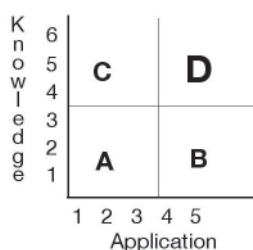# Smithfield High School
Smithfield, Virginia
Isle of Wight County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- culture of high expectations and support
- data-driven decisions
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- shared decision making
- positive school climate
- personalized learning
- rigorous and relevant curriculum
- student engagement

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	1,173
White	61%
Black	35%
Hispanic	2%
Asian	1%
Economically Disadvantaged	25%
English Language Learners	1%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	92%
Mathematics Pass Rate	86%
Graduation Rate	87%

Executive Summary

Smithfield High School (SHS) is located in Isle of Wight County, Virginia. The community is ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. SHS is a comprehensive high school in an area that is becoming less rural and more suburban. More than half of SHS students (60 percent) are white, while 35 percent are African-American. One-fourth of SHS students qualify for free/reduced lunch and are classified as economically disadvantaged.

SHS is a school in which high expectations are an integral part of the environment. This culture was not always the norm at Smithfield. In the initial administration of the state's *Standards of Learning* (SOL) assessments in 1998, fewer than 1 percent of SHS students achieved proficiency in Algebra I. The school's

leadership team began a process that is now institutionalized at SHS. The initial process included the following components:

- **Teacher involvement.** Teachers helped to identify areas of strength and weaknesses in students. Teachers were encouraged to focus attention on areas highlighted by the data analysis.
- **Data analysis (in this case, SOL assessment data).** The analysis of data was extended to include the content of the courses, both as listed in the curriculum guides and as taught in the classrooms.
- **Instructional responses.** Teachers were required to focus on areas of need and to eliminate what the administrative team refers to as "hobby" teaching (teaching areas of interest or favorite lessons regardless of correlation to student and/or program needs).
- **Formative assessments.** Teachers created common tests and quizzes to help assess the levels of student learning in their classes and within the department.
- **Creation of benchmarks for the evaluation of progress.** The SHS leadership team worked with the school's administrators to create intermediate and longer-term performance targets.

As a result of this process, courses were developed and/or modified to ensure that students were being exposed to the key concepts that are both prerequisites to additional learning, as well as areas tested on the state's annual assessment. To assist students, the school schedule was designed to ensure that teaching and learning were supported by the organization of instruction and instructional time.

SHS is on a 4 x 4 block schedule. Courses include regular and honors offerings in the core areas. SHS also offers an array of elective programs in areas of foreign language, art, music, and career and technical education. Advanced Placement (AP) courses include English Literature and Composition, Calculus, United States History, Chemistry, Biology, Latin, and Spanish. Additional AP courses are offered online in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education. SHS students can also take dual-enrollment courses, such as Political Science, Statistics, and Western Civilization, taught in conjunction with Paul D. Camp Community College. Students gifted in the visual and performing arts can audition and (if accepted) attend the Governor's School for the Arts in Norfolk, Virginia. Students who excel in mathematics, science, and technology can elect to attend New Horizon's School for Science and Technology in Hampton. SHS offers a wide range of career and technical courses either on the school campus or at the Pruden Center in Suffolk. Students can earn certification in numerous programs, such as Auto Body, Cisco Networking, Early Childhood Development, Electronics Technician, and Multimedia Communication.

Staff members are committed to their task of supporting the school and its students. The principal has created **shared leadership positions**, which provide successful teachers with opportunities to grow and develop outside of their classrooms. Teachers make themselves available to students for extra tutoring sessions. Much time is spent on **planning each student's long-term academic career**. Guidance counselors work with family members and students to create an **individualized plan for high school** that will be relevant and meaningful to postsecondary studies. This plan is updated annually to meet the changing needs and interests of each student. As a part of the SHS career/college planning focus, the staff has posted a bulletin board on which the college acceptances of graduating seniors are listed. Students have been inspired by the acceptances to create more aggressive goals for themselves. This represents one of numerous intentional strategies designed to encourage and engage students.

Although high performance on the state's large-scale assessments represents an important criterion for identifying successful schools, SHS has made such achievement the minimum standard for success. SHS leadership has moved the school beyond this standard and has focused staff efforts on ensuring that students are well prepared for postsecondary experiences. There is an **atmosphere of respect, commitment, caring, and dedication** evident within the administrative team, among the faculty, and among the students. The school's motto is "to graduate students for success in postsecondary education and employment."

1. School Culture

In recent years, SHS has achieved **scores above the state averages**. This success has resulted from new approaches to problem analysis and resolution that have become an integral part of the SHS culture. The school has moved well beyond the goal of simply passing state assessments. This is evident in the clear sense

of high expectations and goals that are geared toward the preparation of SHS students for experiences after high school. Planning for each student's future begins immediately upon entrance to SHS, with the creation of a jointly developed school plan designed to identify and support each student's interests. This plan is updated annually, and course schedules are matched with the plan.

One of the defining elements of the culture at Smithfield is its commitment to excellence in every area. The administration and staff at SHS are constantly looking for ways to increase the levels of learning and achievement for every single student and group of students at the school.

SHS is a school in which leadership plays a critical role. The principal is a **dynamic and visionary leader**. She is assisted by a team of skilled educators. The traditional leadership structure is augmented by the use of **lead teachers**, teachers who have achieved high levels of teaching success and are offered the opportunity to develop their leadership skills by supporting the needs of the school. The current lead teacher is providing support for new staff and for teacher use of data in instructional planning. The SHS mission statement captures what one sees in the school:

> The Smithfield High School community adopts as its mission to provide a safe, caring, and orderly environment of meaningful and challenging experiences, which foster students' individual strengths, develop their respect for diversity, and encourage them to set and achieve high personal goals.

2. Core Academic Learning

Students respond successfully to the **culture of high expectations**. The school has consistently made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and has also been successful in meeting or exceeding expectations established through the Virginia *Standards of Learning* (SOL) assessment program. In 2006, 92 percent of students were successful at the advanced or proficient level in English. In mathematics, 87 percent of SHS students scored at or above the proficient level. In science, 87 percent of students scored at or above the proficient level.

Students are encouraged to schedule courses of high rigor and that there are no "outs" from this challenge. The staff indicated that the use of common assessments by the two county high schools has had a significant impact on instruction and achievement levels of students. Staff members have embraced the need to provide each student with strong core programs. There is a strong commitment to the notion that "**doing it right the first time**" is an important part of the school environment. Although SHS does not have extensive remediation programs, there are a variety of ways in which students can obtain help to maintain expected levels of performance. All teachers have posted tutorial hours, and special tutoring sessions are available to students enrolled in the school's AP program.

The **diversity of awards and recognitions** earned by students and staff reflects the strength of the school's programs. Such awards include

- National Merit Scholar, Finalist, Fall 2006
- National Merit Scholar, Semifinalist, Fall 2006
- Elie Wiesel Writing Contest, Third Place, Spring 2007
- ASCAP Foundation, Young Jazz Composer Award, Winter 2007
- Virginia Commonwealth University, High School Jazz Piano Competition, Winter 2007
- James Madison University, Best Show – Tri-State Jazz Competition, Spring 2007
- Marketing DECA State Finalists, 2006 and 2007
- FBLA First Place in the Region
- SHS Chapter – Project ASK – First Place in the Region for Fundraising
- Junior Classical League (First Vice-President of JCL National Latin Convention, Best in Show)
- Oratorical Contest
- Art Student Gallery Winners, Spring 2007
- Beta Club – Second Place in English at Beta State Convention
- First Place in Black and White Group Photo at Beta State Convention
- Second Place in Arts and Crafts Jewelry at Beta State Convention
- SHS Swim Team State Finalists

- Fulbright Exchange Program Principal, Fall 2006; Teacher, Fall 2007
- Excellence in Holocaust Education Award, Second Place, Spring 2007
- Isle of Wight County Teacher of the Year, Winter 2006
- Bay Rivers District Football Coach of the Year

3. Stretch Learning

SHS places great emphasis on opportunities for students to participate in and succeed in challenging learning opportunities. More than 20 percent of all 11th and 12th graders are participating in AP courses. This represents a growth of 6 percent in the past three years, and is 13 percent above the state average. Prior to graduation, 9 percent of the students earn at least six college credits in the school's dual-enrollment program. Additionally, students participate in the Virginia Governor's School Program in the visual and performing arts or mathematics, science, and technology.

There are no barriers to challenging courses. Students are encouraged by guidance staff and teachers to attempt challenging programs and are offered support through the school's faculty tutorial schedule and/or the AP tutoring programs. Teachers always are available to help and support. This availability was an important part of the atmosphere of mutual respect and trust that students described as the norm in the school. Stretch opportunities for students are not limited to academics. The exceptional **career/college planning services** available to students extend the notion of stretch learning. As noted earlier, entering freshmen participate with their counselors and families in a career-planning session. SHS has a full-time college counseling consultant who works with students to plan their college selection and application process. The counselor provides financial aid guidance and application support. The success of this program is reflected in the significant increase in college attendance rates, as well as in the acceptance of students at highly competitive colleges. The number of underrepresented students who have college acceptances and financial aid/scholarships has grown significantly.

The goal of the administration and faculty at the school is to know each individual student so well that they can "capture" them, connect with them, and let them know that they are individually important and cared about. In this way, the school can maximize its chances of ensuring that each student achieves at the highest possible level. The school uses technology as a tool to support the students in the career and college search process. The data from these tools are used to assess student progress on individual and group levels.

4. Student Engagement

All students mentioned the **level of respect they felt from their teachers**. They indicated that the rules in the school were clear and fairly enforced. Discipline and/or safety were not issues for the students at SHS. They described a **safe, secure, and welcoming atmosphere**.

SHS takes advantage of its place as a community center to provide students with a variety of ways in which they can connect to the school. While academic rigor and challenge are important at the school, there also is considerable emphasis on other areas of the curriculum outside of the subjects that are assessed on the SOL.

As a part of the SHS career/college planning focus, college acceptances are listed on a bulletin board. Students repeatedly pointed out the significance of this board. Freshmen and sophomore groups indicated that they regularly look at the board and have been inspired by the acceptances of upperclassmen to create more aggressive goals for themselves.

5. Personal Skill Development

The sense of responsibility extends to areas beyond those necessary to pass the state's assessments. The array of clubs and teams offered to SHS students provides options for valuable lessons in teamwork and leadership. Leadership roles in at least one club and/or extracurricular activity are held by 13 percent of SHS students. Students cite the participation of staff in these activities as a critical factor in helping them to see the school's adults in broader roles.

Opportunities in the **career and technical education (CTE) program** provide students with additional chances to expand both their interests and their personal skills. The list of awards honoring the school and its students in these areas is a testimony to the significant levels of participation by SHS students in such activities.

A unique process used in SHS to assist with personal skill development is the school's participation in a nationally available program, "**TurnItIn**." This software application allows educators to check students' work for improper citation or potential plagiarism by comparing it against continuously updated databases using the industry's most advanced search technology. In piloted class sections, students post written assignments on this Web site, aware that the site allows staff to identify plagiarized work. School leaders see the use of this application as a means of further ensuring the success of their students beyond SHS by reducing the reliance on short-cut approaches in class assignments.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

The administrative team and the staff have recognized the importance of their work in the classrooms. This awareness seems to have been sparked by the need to significantly improve the students' performance on the state's large-scale assessments. Along with this understanding came the recognition of the connection between high-quality instruction and student performance. The schoolwide commitment to the **replacement of "hobby" teaching with carefully structured and sequenced courses** was a critical step in ensuring that all SHS students could succeed in rigorous classes.

The use of **lead teachers** by the school further supported this change. Selected from applicants representing highly successful teachers in the school, the lead teachers provide substantial levels of support for classroom teachers. An example of this support is the use of data to inform and improve instruction.

It also is obvious in observing and interviewing SHS teachers that there is a strong value placed on instructional time. Interruptions are minimized and teachers reported that administrative support allows them to focus their attention on instruction. There is evidence of significant collaboration among teachers both in the planning of lessons as well as in the design and administration of assessments. The integrity of instruction is supported by the SHS guidance staff, who encourage students to schedule challenging courses and provide support for them in the connection of courses to career/college planning. Students reported that it is almost impossible to navigate an easy course through SHS. Hard work and achievement are respected and supported. It is clear from discussions and classroom observations that teachers are focusing not only on the level of complexity but also on the connection between the content and the real world.

There is a strong sense of **staff collaboration**. Collegial efforts are encouraged and intentional. Classroom observations by teachers of colleagues in their own and other departments have become a part of the school culture. This process contributes to discussions on ways in which units of instruction may be coordinated among departments, as well as on ways teachers can support one another through interdisciplinary reinforcement of key concepts.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Virginia has a strong alignment of standards, curriculum framework documents, and assessments. Smithfield High School makes extensive use of the materials provided by the state's Department of Education. The extensive analyses and the close alignment between state standards and assessments allow the school to make the use of assessment data an important part of the school's analysis and improvement efforts.

Data at SHS are used in a variety of forms. Formative, summative, and longitudinal information is collected and analyzed. SHS is a school that thrives by placing people "in conflict" with data. That is, the school leaders and members of the school's leadership team regularly **use data to examine previously held assumptions**. Such analyses have created a climate in which dissonance between beliefs and data may be examined objectively and conclusions reached on the basis of sound information. The principal has played a key role in the introduction of this approach. She and her team are firmly committed to its use. Staff members report that they, too, recognize the value in this approach. A sampling of data collections includes

- state SOL performance data
- advanced course performance data
- assessment data
- college applications and tracking information.

The school utilizes a technology-based reporting system, ReportsOnlineSystem, which provides detailed information about locally administered assessments. Such reports include data for student and class

performance, item analysis, and correlations with the state's SOL. Teacher interviews revealed that the staff makes extensive use of this system and regularly adjusts instruction based on insights gained from the reports. All reports are disaggregated, and their use has contributed to significant reductions in performance gaps among the school's subgroup populations.

Additionally, the administrative team makes use of data collected in both formal and informal settings, meetings with members of the staff, departments, and the school's Leadership Council. Information from these sources is used to define needs, to discuss and analyze options, and to evaluate progress on implemented programs.

8. Transitions

Smithfield High School is physically adjacent to the local middle school. Consequently, younger students have numerous opportunities to see and become acquainted with the high school, eliminating much of the transition anxiety that normally accompanies the move from middle to high school. Data examined by the school leaders, however, indicated that failure rates among incoming ninth graders were high enough to show that the transition to rigorous work in an atmosphere of high expectations was an area of concern.

In response, SHS introduced the **small learning community** (SLC) during the 2005-2006 school year as a new approach to providing support for incoming students. The SLC is a research-based project that allows ninth-grade students to achieve success through a cohesive transition to high school. All freshmen attend their core academic classes within the SLC, a highly collaborative setting in which their teachers meet regularly regarding lesson planning, student performance, attendance, discipline, and overall program goals. These goals are shared and reinforced throughout the entire SLC. Data from the first year of the program yielded a number of areas for further investigation, and school leaders reported that they will be using this information to modify the program prior to the start of the 2007-08 school year.

Students reported in interviews that the most significant support they received during their transition to high school came from their teachers. They cited the teachers' willingness to be available to help them and to encourage them as a pivotal part of their successful transition. These students also cited the career/college planning process and the clarity of the expectations for behavior and achievement as an important part of their acclimation to the school.

The extensive support given to students when applying to college and planning their careers has been described throughout this study. Students are encouraged to apply to challenging postsecondary schools. Guidance staff, along with parents and community leaders, work with students to carefully select and navigate the college application process.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

Staff and school leaders clearly understand the important role played by the principal. Her vision and leadership style have been critical in the creation of the data-driven culture. Her inclusive approach to decision making has enabled staff members and leaders to expand their skills and to participate actively in the development of the school. Her unwavering **commitment to quality instruction** in the classroom has resulted in the reputation of SHS as a school of choice for teachers seeking an atmosphere of excellence. Teachers indicated that there is a high level of accountability and that the principal is clear about her expectations in the creation and maintenance of a challenging but nurturing environment for SHS students.

The principal has created a culture in which **emerging leaders** are given the opportunity to grow and to succeed. The use and development of the lead teacher concept provides an excellent example of this commitment. There is a sense of collaboration and fluidity among the various levels of leadership at SHS. It is one of the major strengths of the school.

10. Professional Learning Community

Recently employed teachers reported that the school's interview process clearly defined expectations for new staff members. These expectations included the commitment to quality instruction as well as the commitment to devote time to support the success of SHS. This introduction set the stage for the school's commitment to professional learning. At SHS, **professional learning activities are defined by data.** After data are analyzed, school leaders and teachers identify areas in which additional professional training and/or exploration will

enhance the prospects of improving the target areas. Professional learning opportunities are then planned accordingly.

On a content or departmental level, teams meet weekly to discuss professional development needs. These needs are defined in terms of student needs. Teachers reported that student achievement is emphasized at all levels and in numerous areas. Teachers take great pride in their students, and are accustomed to seeking learning options that will further enhance their ability to serve them. Teachers emphasized that a key element in the development of the school's culture of high expectations and high staff involvement is the level of professional respect they enjoy.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

SHS exhibits an **aggressive approach to the concept of "student centered."** Decisions regarding student programming are made, with the best interests of students receiving greater weight than the interests of the adults. SHS is not without formal support programs. Each SHS staff member has **posted tutorial hours**. These are apparent throughout the school and are also posted on the school's Web site. Interestingly, students reported that they are comfortable asking for assistance from other content area teachers when it is not convenient for them to see their own teacher. Teachers reported that they saw no disadvantages to such open access. The teachers and administrative team members expect all students to do well. Students and staff reported that the ongoing, daily discussions of such expectations are instrumental in maintaining the high level of commitment.

Lessons Learned

- SHS has learned the importance of
  - » using data to force discussions about critical areas
  - » establishing clear and high expectations for both students and staff
  - » providing constant encouragement for adults and students during the change process
  - » realizing that there is value in providing students with positive pictures of future possibilities, e.g., the use of the college attendance wall inspires students to raise their own aspirations.

- In addition, the school has learned that there is a positive correlation between the perception of caring and support by students and their willingness to attempt challenging content.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. The SHS students who are able to meet high expectations are phenomenal young people. I have **great affection and respect for our students**.

2. **Freedom of the faculty to be innovative and take risks**. The caveat is that data must support the innovations, if they are to continue.

3. The school has an **administration that is visionary**, that always puts the needs of students first, and that is willing to fight for our vision.
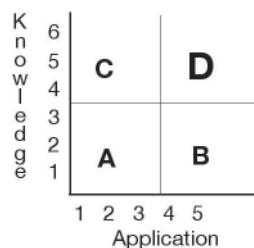
Turner Ashby High School
Bridgewater, Virginia
Rockingham County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- culture of high expectations and support
- data-driven decisions
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- shared decision making
- positive school climate
- personalized learning
- rigorous and relevant curriculum

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	1,114
White	91%
Black	1%
Hispanic	7%
Asian	0%
Economically Disadvantaged	21%
English Language Learners	6%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	91%
Mathematics Pass Rate	94%
Graduation Rate	82%

Executive Summary

Turner Ashby High School (TAHS) opened in the fall of 1956. Its opening meant the consolidation of three schools in the area. The name Turner Ashby High School was selected by the Rockingham County School Board because of the school's location in the Ashby District of the county. The district was named for General Turner Ashby, who fought and died in a battle near Harrisonburg, Virginia, during the Civil War.

TAHS moved into its present facility on Route 42 north of Bridgewater in fall 1989. Three mobile units were added for classroom use in 1998, and five more were added in 2000. During the 2001-2002 school year and the following summer, a new wing was added to the original building. This addition created 20 new

classrooms, including four science rooms and another general purpose computer lab. Along with the new wing, the library was expanded and a girls' team room was added.

Currently, TAHS houses 1,114 students in grades 9-12. The school offers a full selection of core academic programs, a number of Advanced Placement (AP) and dual-enrollment opportunities, as well as a substantial range of career and technical education (CTE) options. Students also may take advantage of additional educational opportunities at several county locations.

TAHS students have done exceptionally well on standard measures of achievement. On the Virginia *Standards of Learning* (SOL) tests, 91 percent of students scored at or above the proficient level in English. In mathematics, 94 percent of students achieved proficiency, in history and social science, 91 percent, and in science, 90 percent. Almost half (49 percent) of TAHS students graduated with a Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma. School SAT scores exceeded the division, state, and national averages. These statistics reflect the school's commitment to rigorous instruction for its students. Students receive an average of 27.5 credits by graduation, the highest average of credits earned over a three-year period across the division's high schools.

Every member of this learning community is committed to rigorous and relevant learning experiences for all students. There are many strategies and programs in place to help students succeed. Teachers offer extended hours and tutoring sessions for students after school. Additionally, the school utilizes computer-assisted instructional opportunities for students who are at-risk.

TAHS has developed the CORE program, which targets incoming freshmen and provides tutoring and other supports for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks. Struggling students are also aided through the "double block" schedule. Students in Algebra or Geometry can be placed in back-to-back classes to give them the extra support they need.

There is a strong sense of staff collaboration at TAHS. Collegial conversations regularly focus on ways in which units of instruction can be coordinated among departments as well as on ways colleagues can support one another through interdisciplinary reinforcement of key concepts. Communication among staff members is extensive and reflective. Staff members are encouraged to share what they know with colleagues. TAHS staff members have internalized the importance of high expectations for the "right things" and the importance of connecting these expectations to real-world experiences.

The faculty and staff are proactive and responsive to developing needs. They look at quantitative and qualitative data to determine what changes need to be made to ensure the greatest degree of student success. Data-driven changes include the development of the CORE program and the additional support made available to struggling students in algebra and geometry classes.

TAHS has a proud tradition of friendly cooperation and mutual respect among students, teachers, administrators, and staff. The word *family* is frequently used to describe the environment at this school. The unique relationship between the school and its community is characterized by a sense of mutual benefit.

1. School Culture

Turner Ashby High School is a school community dominated by **a culture of high expectations.** Students, along with teachers and administrators, have an ingrained commitment to hard work and focused effort. Parents are heavily involved in the school, and students are cared for and nurtured by the staff. The school consistently meets Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. Another significant validation of this commitment to a strong core program is evidenced by the performance of TAHS students on the state assessments. Students overall and within the subgroups meet or exceed the state averages for passing in almost every subject area.

Turner Ashby's commitment to having every student learn at high levels is exemplified in its **CORE program**, which includes a back-to-school night. Now in its second year, this program targets incoming freshmen and provides tutoring and other supports for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks. Some students have elected to put themselves in the CORE program, knowing that they may need extra help. This culture of help for every student also is reflected in the willingness of the staff to be available to students for tutoring and mentoring beyond the limits of the school day. Students interviewed stated this example as a daily reminder of the level of commitment their teachers have to student success.

The Turner Ashby school community offers **a safe and stable environment**. There are several reasons for this, but one of the more notable is the schoolwide discipline policy. This functions almost as a rubric for behavior, with a clearly delineated set of procedures and consequences so that students, teachers, and

parents know exactly what is encouraged, tolerated, or not allowed. There also are clear consequences for each infraction of the discipline code. However, the school's culture is dominated by an emphasis on the positive and acceptable rather than on negative consequences.

It also is important to mention the role of the Bridgewater community in making Turner Ashby a special place. There is **a strong relationship between the school and the town.** TAHS has an outstanding sports program that is a source of community pride, but the relationship also extends beyond athletics to the academic. The community is supportive of the school and all of its programs. Many of the TAHS staff are graduates of the school and active in the community.

2. Core Academic Learning

TAHS is based on core academic learning. Ninety-one percent of students scored at or above the proficient level in English. In mathematics, 94 percent of students achieved proficiency, in history and social science, 91 percent, and in science, 90 percent. This performance regularly exceeds division and state averages for each year. SAT scores are another strong indicator of the commitment to core academic learning. There has been a nine-point increase in the mathematics SAT score. Once again, these gains exceeded the division, state, and national averages, and the gains were made with no difference among the subgroups. Student performance on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery is also impressive, with increases in both the mathematics and the science/technology sections. This is even more remarkable considering that the participation rate has nearly doubled, from 53 to 100 students in three years, and the gains were consistent across subgroups.

One explanation for the high scores is the **emphasis on effective teaching in every part of the school curriculum**. Teachers in every discipline, not just the core subject areas, see strong student scores as part of their responsibility. In classrooms throughout the building, teachers are making relevant connections to various core subjects. To this end, the administrative team actively encourages teachers to work together to see that students succeed at high levels. Academic achievement is closely monitored. The administrative team also makes a strong effort to protect instructional time in the classroom so that teachers can maximize their contact hours with students. If a student fails a section of the state assessment, there is targeted remediation and an expedited retest.

To ensure success in mathematics, the administration and staff at Turner Ashby have created an interesting schedule feature. **Students enrolled in Algebra or Geometry courses can be "double blocked."** This gives struggling students twice as much time to learn the material before they are given the same assessment as the students who are not double blocked. In addition, the mathematics department offers staff tutors an extra two hours a week before or after school.

The school has achieved a number of awards in a wide range of areas. These awards and recognitions reflect the quality of the experiences available to students:

Technology Students Association (TSA)
- TSA - #1 Chapter in Virginia, 2006
- Home of the Virginia TSA President, 2005-2006 school year

Future Farmers of America (FFA)
- Two state officers
- Top FFA chapter in state
- Seventeen State Degree recipients
- Seven American Degree recipients
- Fifteen State Proficiency Award Winners
- Winner, State Agriculture Communications Contest
- Gold-rated FFA Chapter
- Gold-rated in Public Relations
- 100% FFA membership
- Model of Innovation chapter at national FFA Convention
- Winner, area Environthon
- Winner, area Parliamentary Procedure contest
- Designated Blue and Gold award chapter by FFA

Choral Music
- Twelve All-State participants in the past two years
- Two state honors choir participants in the past two years

Yearbook
- 2006 Virginia High School League Trophy Class Yearbook
- 2007 Virginia High School League Trophy Class Yearbook
- National Columbia Scholastic Press Association Gold Medalist (2006 Yearbook)
- Columbia Scholastic Press Association Gold Medalist (2007 Yearbook)
- All Columbian Honors in Design, Coverage, Photography, and Concept (2007 Yearbook)
- National Scholastic Press Association All American with five marks of distinction (2007 Yearbook)

Ruriteen
- Largest Club in America three years running
- Two National Ruriteens of the Year recognized at the National Convention
- Established the Ambassador program, which has become the model for all new Ruriteen clubs across the nation

3. Stretch Learning

A school such as Turner Ashby is never content to rest on past successes. Instead, TAHS is always pushing to do better and achieve more. Enrollment in **dual-enrollment courses** has doubled in three years, and the average number of dual-enrollment credits is above that of the district average. There also has been a significant increase in the number of students enrolled in the Governor's School. This is important to note because the commute to the Governor's School starts before 7 a.m.

Students at TAHS earn roughly 27.5 credits by graduation, the highest average of credits earned over a three-year period across the division's high schools. A wide variety of rigorous and relevant courses are offered, and students are encouraged to enroll in as many as their course load can fit. Fifteen percent of all students at TAHS are enrolled in **AP courses**. This is a figure that has remained steady over the past several years, and the number of students taking AP classes is twice that of the closest district high school number. Stretch learning also is evident in the number of students who **complete a CTE program—**64.2 percent of TAHS students, up 10 percent since 2004, again showing the highest percentage among district high schools.

Another example of stretch learning is the **large number of students (144 at TAHS) enrolled in three or more years of world languages**. This is a marked increase over the past three years, once again showing the Turner Ashby way of doing things—continued strong success and involvement.

4. Student Engagement

Student engagement is nurtured by the strong sense of community at this school. It was the examination of student failure, particularly ninth graders, that led to the establishment of the CORE program. There are a number of interventions in place to see that students are successful. As the population has changed, TAHS has responded. The school has implemented a developmental reading course, employing two full-time ESL teachers, and the administration focuses aggressively on helping new students fit into the TAHS community as rapidly as possible.

Interviews with students illustrate the high levels of commitment that the students saw in their teachers. Many of the teachers grew up in the area and are heavily invested in the success of their students. Similarly, many of the students have been together since grade school so they know each other well. Although there is no formal mentoring process in place, there is an informal sense of responsibility to ensure that no student falls through the cracks and to see that every student is successful. The students know that the adults in the building care about them as individuals, care about their academic success, and care about their maturation into responsible citizens.

This **high level of caring and support** is seen in the low dropout rate at TAHS. While it was already comparatively low at 2.5 percent in 2004, it has been reduced even more and stands at just 2.06 percent. Turner Ashby also has the highest attendance rate in the district, at nearly 95 percent. Thanks in part to the schoolwide discipline policy, incidents of school safety violations have decreased since 2004. **Participation**

in clubs and athletics remain high, with an increase in Hispanic student participation as well as majority students. Clubs and athletics are an important element in the TAHS/community relationship.

The vast majority of students are involved in extracurricular activities. Students reported that there was great support among the faculty for sponsoring existing clubs and for starting a new club when students had an interest in doing so. The community is supportive of the school's athletic program. Many of the school clubs include a community outreach element in the form of either formal or informal community service. The Ruriteen Club, part of the national Ruritan community service organization, is one of the largest chapters in the country and sets a tremendous example through many civic activities, as does the active FFA chapter.

5. Personal Skill Development

Personal skill development begins with an emphasis on character education and continues through a range of activities, behaviors, and policies. An example is the **schoolwide discipline code**. Because policies with clear expectations have been established, teachers are happy to be members of the faculty and students are secure in knowing what is and is not acceptable. As a result, the number of discipline referrals has been the lowest in the district since 2004. There has also been a reduction in the number of fights reported, down 75 percent in a two-year period. There is an impressive list of accomplishments, with four students holding district, state, or national offices and 95 percent of the graduates completing more than 10 hours of service learning. A deep sense of caring and trust exists at Turner Ashby, and this atmosphere permeates the school community in both tangible and intangible ways. Student government is an active concept in this school and the school's club organization has contributed significantly to the spirit of community through the many community service projects, which are initiated by the various clubs.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

Administrators and teachers work hard to ensure that students are exposed to **planned, thoughtful learning experiences**. The **program of studies is rich and varied**, with staff making a concerted effort to provide experiences that match the expressed needs of the students. When size constraints limit the scheduling options for students, the staff tries to find high-quality alternatives for the students. Rarely are students told that there is no other option.

TAHS offers students opportunities well beyond the minimum requirements for state diplomas. Students may schedule courses within the school, at the county's technical center, at other county centers, in dual-enrollment and AP programs, and, recently, utilizing a variety of distance learning options. TAHS also has especially strong offerings for students in the area of career and technical education. Programs in these areas have achieved state and national recognition, and students involved in these programs have been recognized for their achievements.

There is a strong belief at Turner Ashby that quality instructional experiences for students begin with the employment of **high-quality teachers**. In interviews, teachers and administrators cited the care devoted to the recruitment of teachers who will contribute to the "TA family." Recently employed teachers reported that the school's interview process, which includes administrative and teacher representatives, clearly defined expectations for new staff. These expectations included the commitment to quality instruction as well as the commitment to devote time to support the success of students. Teachers emphasized that a key element in the development of the school's culture of high expectations and high staff involvement is the level of professional respect they enjoy.

Although located in a rural area of the state with a strong agricultural base, TAHS graduates 49 percent of its students with a Virginia Advanced Diploma. This statistic reflects the school's commitment to rigorous instruction for its students. This commitment is equally evident in the accomplishments of students in the school's programs in career and technical education. In core academic classes, lessons are extended to connect to contemporary issues. In the areas of visual and performing arts, students not only participate in local performances but also travel to perform in state, regional, and national competitions and/or exhibits. In all areas of the curriculum, TAHS extends the classroom instruction via the use of an impressive array of out-of-school learning experiences.

There are no school-created access barriers to any school programs. **Students are encouraged to explore a variety of challenging options** and many do so. School statistics verify that students from all subgroup populations are accessing the school's strong core program and many of its stretch programs.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Virginia has a strong alignment of standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments. Turner Ashby High School makes **extensive use of the materials provided by the state's Department of Education and county education staff**. Because of the solid relationship in the state between standards and state assessments, courses reflect more closely the priorities established for the state. Additionally, this close alignment makes the use of assessment data an important part of the school's analysis and improvement efforts.

It is clear from discussions with members of the administrative team and teachers that data play an integral part in the decisions concerning Turner Ashby programs. Both formal summative assessments and periodic formative assessments are used extensively to determine the progress of individual students, teacher performance, and program effectiveness. Data tools and technical support allow staff to identify student concerns by standards cluster for the SOL. The county has provided an **assessment support specialist** to the schools to assist in the assessment administration process and the analyses of data from these assessments. Teachers reported that there is a **regular process of self-evaluation** completed on a departmental and individual basis. The annual revision of data-driven improvement targets is considered the norm rather than the exception. Turner Ashby staff members make extensive use of an **assessment-authoring tool to create periodic formative assessments**. These assessments are designed to identify areas of strength and weakness in students.

Additional ways in which data are used to inform school decisions include

- collection of student performance information via a **variety of assessment strategies**, including portfolios, student demonstrations, group and individual projects, and the like
- surveys of student and community satisfaction
- **follow-up studies of school graduates** regarding the quality of their educational experiences
- an **electronic parent information system** (Touching Base) that makes student performance information available to parents.

Data from these sources are regularly used to inform program evaluations and discussions about future needs.

8. Transitions

TAHS in recent years has developed an evolving response to problems experienced by some students during the transition years. These students were having difficulty making the transition to the expectations of the Turner Ashby school culture. A staff team has used the data gathered about this difficulty to **establish a program called CORE for incoming freshmen**. Designed for at-risk students who are not eligible for other available support services, the program provides additional support through the creation of an academy-like structure. Identified freshmen are scheduled for CORE 1, which provides **intensive support in the form of tutoring, study skills instruction, planning strategies, and limited student choice regarding classes and time use**. Students may be enrolled in CORE 1 via recommendations from middle school teachers, by TAHS staff based on observations about a student's performance, and/or by the students themselves.

CORE 2 programming is available to sophomore students and provides students previously in CORE 1 with support, but with a reduced structure as students demonstrate the ability to deal effectively with greater levels of independence. Interviews with students and data provided by the program staff indicate exceptionally high levels of success with the CORE program. Students enrolled in the program indicated that they would (and do) recommend the program to their friends.

Perhaps the strongest form of transitional support for Turner Ashby students, however, is the **caring supportive atmosphere** that pervades the building. Students regularly used the words *family* and *community* to describe the relationship between students and teachers. In all interviews, students indicated the accessibility of staff members. They cited caring teachers and their willingness to help as major reasons for their success, as well as for their respect for the teachers. This environment represents one of the major components of the school's success.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

The principal discussed at length **the role of administrators in the positive culture of the school**. The administrative team is new, but has made a definite impact on the staff and students. Teachers indicated that the principal always responds positively to suggestions and/or expressions of concern. "His door is always open and he always listens," said one staff member, echoing the sentiments of other teachers interviewed. Students also reported that their opinions were respected and that the school's leaders responded positively to their requests. The existence of the school's extensive club structure is a direct example of the receptivity shown by the principal and his team. According to one student, "If you have an idea for a club, the principal is always receptive and supportive. He allows us to try to make it happen."

School leaders have **clear expectations for staff and students alike**. Teachers reported that, beginning with the interview process and continuing during their time in the district, there was never a doubt about what was expected of them. They also said that they **feel valued and respected**. Help is available whenever needed, but professional behavior is anticipated and enabled. There is a strong sense of family among the staff, and teachers regularly attributed this to the efforts of the administrative team.

Administrators and teaching staff members cited the development of the **new schoolwide discipline program** as an example of positive administrative responsiveness to faculty concerns. This program combines a clearly defined set of expected behaviors and consequences with a focused, intentional concentration on the creation of desired positive behaviors. Students found the processes fair and the instructional aspects of the program creative. Students have been involved in all aspects of the program and its development.

The principal is committed to the continuation of the school's success and the maintenance of its exceptional reputation. He is valued by the staff for his sense of inclusion and collaboration. He and his team have worked with the staff to identify areas of strength and target new areas for improvement.

10. Professional Learning Community

Professional learning at TAHS takes place on both formal and informal levels. On the formal level, staff members make frequent use of opportunities provided by the county. Teachers cited the availability of **quality and timely professional learning experiences** offered by the county as well as the county subsidization of such programs as major reasons why they are willing and able to continue to pursue these experiences. Additionally, there are a number of professional development options available within the school based on the needs and interests of staff and the administration. Professional learning community activities include book studies, discussions, research, and planning.

The **commitment to professional learning** among TAHS faculty also extends well beyond the creation of professional learning communities. There is an intellectual and emotional commitment to the pursuit of quality experiences for students. Teachers meet within departments and within areas of content interest to discuss and explore improvement opportunities. The nature of the school's culture and the close-knit relationships contribute to the frequency and quality of such informal professional learning experiences.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

The Turner Ashby school community pays careful attention to all students and has a number of options available for struggling students. Because of the strong relationships between students and staff, the teachers remain the primary resource of support. Students and teachers both identified the relationship between staff and students as a major part of the positive culture that characterizes the school. Because of this relationship, students are encouraged to seek help whenever needed and are confident that teachers will be available to assist them.

On a more structured basis, **teachers offer extended hours and tutoring sessions** for students after school. Departments schedule such hours on their own and offer as much as two hours per week per teacher. Additionally, the school utilizes computer-assisted instructional opportunities for students who are at risk of falling below proficiency on the SOL assessments. The English Department assesses student reading levels, and this information is used to identify students who may struggle with content reading. Assistance for such students is available through the scheduling of reading support classes and/or through additional teacher support.

TAHS offers an inclusion program for students with special needs. This program is growing and has been an effective source of support for all students involved in inclusion classes. Students with special needs have performed well above average on state tests. A small number of the students require the use of a modified diploma option.

Lessons Learned

- Turner Ashby has learned the importance of increasing levels of **community commitment** by focusing more on what the school can do for the community than what the community can do for the school.

- School leaders and staff have realized that incorporating **aggressive student support options**, providing extensive support for and **commitment to student extracurricular programs, and collaborating with students** on key issues such as behavior codes help create a climate of mutual respect and caring.

- Turner Ashby's leaders have learned the importance of reinforcing the value of teaching and teachers by **eliminating instructional interruptions, inviting teacher participation in school initiatives, and encouraging instructional collaboration.**

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. Committed, caring, and talented faculty, staff, and administration

2. Respectful, hardworking, and motivated students

3. Positive school spirit achieved through success in academics, sports, and visual and performing arts along with strong community support
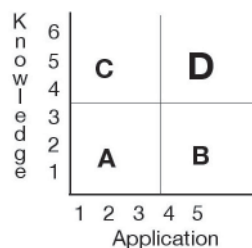
West Point High School
West Point, Virginia
West Point Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- culture of high expectations and support
- data-driven decisions
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- shared decision making
- positive school climate
- personalized learning
- rigorous and relevant curriculum

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	259
White	84%
Black	12%
Hispanic	0%
Asian	3%
Economically Disadvantaged	14%
English Language Learners	0.9%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	100%
Mathematics Pass Rate	93%
Graduation Rate	98%

Executive Summary

West Point High School (WPHS) is committed to being the best school it can possibly be by maintaining a tradition of high academics, student success, and rich extracurricular programs. West Point has a long and proud tradition of academic excellence. This reputation annually draws between 50 and 60 additional, tuition-paying students from outside the school division. In addition, a number of West Point faculty members have elected to pay the tuition supplement to have their children, who live outside the school division, attend the school.

Reflective uses of data, an unwillingness to allow students to fail, a collegial and caring climate,

and the commitment to collaborative leadership have resulted in an exceptional experience for adults and students alike. The school day and the school year reflect the use of time to address identified needs. Teachers at West Point work a longer than normal teaching day (eight hours) and are scheduled for an additional two weeks of planning time prior to the opening of school. To gather data about student achievement, nine-week assessments are administered in all areas. Performance on these assessments, as well as student performance on more frequently administered assessments, is used to determine which students need extra support. The school has an eighth-period intervention/support program designed to support students who need extra help.

The mission of the high school is to maximize the intellect and abilities of all students so that they will be prepared for a life of continuous learning and able to provide the basic necessities of life for themselves and their future families. The following belief statement embodies what one sees in West Point High School: "Excellence must be exhibited in all we do and must be instilled in our children by encouraging and nourishing respect for others, honesty and integrity, and responsibility, dedication, and commitment."

Students and staff have internalized the commitment to excellence and high standards. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and support at West Point. Professional staff members demonstrate acute awareness of the needs of individual students. Conferencing and support services reinforce this. The West Point High School community has focused significant attention on the success of students at all levels. To this end, the school has involved less-engaged students through the creation of high minimum course requirements and development of extensive support services. Additionally, staff members at West Point pay close attention to the diversity of learner needs. School leaders have created an environment of professional commitment and collaboration. Professional learning is directly related to school needs as defined by comprehensive data collection efforts. The leadership of the principal and the support of the community have been an integral part of the success of the school.

1. School Culture

There is a warm and welcoming atmosphere that is immediately evident upon entering West Point. There is a strong sense of **mutual support among staff members**. There is a **respectful and supportive connection among students**.

As noted, West Point HS is a small school, with an enrollment of 259 students. Such size frequently limits the variety of options available to students. Because of the commitment to each student, school leaders have developed a number of creative ways to provide students with access to challenging and unusual opportunities. These include

- **individualized student schedules** that help resolve scheduling conflicts
- independent study options
- distance learning opportunities
- **staff flexibility** in arranging class schedules.

The culture of the school is defined by a climate of high expectations, extensive use of data, and the commitment of the staff. This climate is maintained via a set of **clear expectations, sufficient time for each student to succeed, rewards for positive performance, and consequences for substandard performance/behavior.** Students recognize both the firmness of the approaches and the personal benefits of such approaches.

Teachers know each student by name. They are aware of the strengths, needs, and interests of all students and this information is used, along with comprehensive performance data, to ensure that students are challenged and supported. While data are used extensively to identify students in need of support, data are not used to narrow student options. There are no prerequisites for challenging courses and all students may access them.

It is clear that the adults in the West Point school community have accepted the need to develop and maintain strong, supportive relationships with students. Exchanges between adults and students provide excellent examples of this commitment. Students feel safe and respected by adults.

2. Core Academic Learning

West Point High School students met the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements and have exceeded the state pass rates in the mandated test areas of English and mathematics. Students have sustained this performance for the past three years. In English, 100 percent of West Point students have met or exceeded the Virginia standards. In mathematics, 96 percent of West Point students have met or exceeded the state standard.

In addition to impressive statistics at the proficient level, West Point students have also exceeded state rates for advanced levels in every comparison. Sixty-seven percent of West Point students have scored at the advanced proficient level and 34 percent have achieved the advanced proficient level in mathematics. There are **no significant subgroup differences** in these areas. West Point students also have SAT scores above the national and Virginia averages. They have sustained this performance for the past three years.

Because of the small size of the school, West Point does not have sufficient numbers of students to report in several subgroup areas. However, school-gathered data show that each group has surpassed Virginia's pass rate requirements.

The array of course options and learning experiences available to West Point students belies the size of the school. By **focusing attention on strong core courses with minimal variations** within these course offerings (e.g., there are no multiple versions of algebra), school leaders have been able to create a schedule that allows students to choose from a variety of strong core and elective courses. More than 75 percent of West Point students schedule three or more years of a world language. Options in less traditional languages are available either through onsite offerings or via several distance learning options. More than 45 percent of the students qualify for the state's Early College Scholars program. Fifty-four percent of the students earn a Virginia Advanced Studies Diploma. Additionally, the school and school division have earned the following honors and/or awards:

- Title I Distinguished School Division Award
- #1 School Division Scores on Virginia *Standards of Learning*
- Standard & Poor's Academic Outperformer Award
- *School's Match* What Parents Want Award
- Governor's Champion in Education Award
- Regional Gifted Teacher of the Year
- Four Regional Teachers of the Year
- Technology Student Association Advisor of the Year
- Superintendent of the Year
- Wachovia Sportsmanship Award (multiple years)
- First Place – Regional Forensics and Regional Drama

3. Stretch Learning

As a part of its environment of high expectations, West Point leaders ensure that every student will participate in a strong core program and have opportunities for challenging stretch learning experiences. Students and staff work together to develop opportunities for exploration and challenge. For example, the school's guidance counselor meets annually with each student and his/her parents to develop a personalized plan based on accomplishments, aptitudes, and emerging career interests.

The atmosphere of high expectations is reflected in the statistics pertaining to the accomplishments of the school's graduates. Virginia requires 22 credits for a standard diploma and 24 credits for an Advanced Studies Diploma. West Point **students average 30 credits by graduation**. This credit total does not vary by subgroup. West Point students who access dual-enrollment options earn an average of 20 college degree credits prior to graduation (three-year average). There are 60 college credits available through in-class and online Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Annually, the school's graduates are accepted in the most highly regarded universities, and awards for students are the norm rather than the exception. Stretch learning opportunities include **extensive offerings in world languages, AP programs, and rigorous dual-enrollment courses**. Participation rates in these programs reflect the acceptance of such challenges by the students.

4. Student Engagement

West Point High School represents an outstanding example of student engagement. The relationships between students and adults are mutually respectful, supportive, and deep. The same is true for the relationships among students and among staff members. What is unusual about the importance and commitment to such relationships is the absence of formal programs designed to enhance or create such an atmosphere.

Interviews with staff reveal that staff members accept and develop a number of roles in their relationships with the students. Staff members indicated that they serve as "teachers, fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters." **Teachers regularly reported that their work is not confined to the classroom, but extends to the halls, the community, and participation in after-school activities.** They further indicated that new staff members who do not accept such responsibilities do not remain long at West Point. There is huge pride in the quality of the relationships and the caring atmosphere that characterizes the school. Such relationships have become a part of the tradition at West Point, and nothing less is accepted.

Teachers have devoted substantial effort to ensuring **quality and highly relevant instruction.** This commitment has resulted in classes in which levels of student engagement and participation are high. This climate also has enhanced the staff's ability to demand and get high levels of academic and personal performance. Staff members acknowledge the role played by the small size of the school and the manner in which this facilitates positive relationships. They are equally quick to point out, however, that much of what one sees in the school is the result of conscious effort and commitment to accept nothing less. Interviews with students revealed that virtually all students accept that the cornerstones of the school's approach (high expectations, time to succeed, rewards for success, and consequences for underperformance), while uncomfortable and inconvenient at times, are responsible for their successes.

The organization of the West Point district has the middle school and high school sharing core facilities and some classroom space. As a result of this arrangement and the opportunities for middle school students to participate in high-school-level courses, a large number of students coming into ninth grade have had significant exposure to the building and its programs. This makes the transition to high school quite seamless and has eliminated the need for formal transition programs.

5. Personal Skill Development

West Point High School has a unique approach to character and personal skills development. Rather than add a program to the students' day, the school community has determined that **teachers are responsible for integrating character development into their courses and interactions with the students**. Indicative of the commitment to character development is the cover of the student handbook. This cover depicts a holographic iceberg, with the majority of its mass visible below the ocean's surface. The caption for this cover is "Personality is what's seen: Character is what lies beneath." The school has consistently won the Wachovia Sportsmanship, Ethics and Integrity Award.

West Point provides a surprisingly **wide variety of independent and self-directed learning options**. These include participation in the Virginia online education project, independent and online AP programs, extensive dual-enrollment programs, and a flexible approach to meeting the needs of students via scheduling modifications and independent study. In all cases, West Point students are encouraged to work closely with an adult. West Point offers **a wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities**, designed to provide its students with the chance to explore personal growth and leadership opportunities.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

The school leadership team at West Point spends considerable effort recruiting and maintaining quality instructional staff. The staff represent a blend of highly experienced, longtime teachers from West Point and highly effective younger staff members. Efforts are made to have the staff reflect the diversity of the community and the student body.

Classroom observations reveal that teachers are encouraged **to focus on both rigor and relevance in the development of learning experiences for their students.** There is a strong connection between the content of the lesson and connections to real-world experiences. High levels of learning (application and evaluation) were evident in all lessons.

No courses have prerequisite requirements, and students are encouraged to attempt high-

level courses and learning experiences. Expectations remain the same for all students. Students requiring additional support in order to achieve success are accommodated in the school's **eighth-period intervention/ support block** and through the additional support provided by teachers. This approach assures rigor and high instructional quality without preventing less able students from experiencing success in the challenging environment.

Because of the school's commitment to the use of data to inform its decisions, West Point is able to respond quickly to identified areas of need. For example, after disappointing performances by students on the state's *English Standards of Learning* test, the school instituted a **common literacy experience for all 11th grade students**. This experience has been identified as a critical factor in the exceptionally high performance of West Point students on state assessments and for the extraordinarily high graduation rates. Students credit their experiences in this class as a significant factor in their high level of performance in postsecondary studies.

Communication among staff members is exceptional. Sharing information about students, lessons, planning, results, and difficulties is the norm. Teachers cited numerous examples of interdisciplinary instruction made possible by this mutual commitment to providing quality experiences for students. Examples extend to all core areas and frequently blend these core areas with team-taught lessons/units/projects in areas of the visual and performing arts and technology.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Virginia has a strong alignment of standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments. West Point High School makes **extensive use of the materials provided by the Virginia Department of Education** in the development of course guides. The process used in the development of such materials is coordinated at each building level, and students enjoy the results of a coordinated sequence of learning outcomes and experiences. This is evident in the review of materials used in the high school.

Many aspects of the school's organization and schedule reflect the school's commitment to its continuing goals of high expectations/high performance. The school day and year reflect this use of time to address identified needs. **Teachers at West Point work a longer than normal teaching day (eight hours) and are scheduled for an additional two weeks of planning time prior to the opening of school.** During the two-week planning session, teachers review data for all students. Data reviewed at this time include detailed performance reports that accompany Virginia *Standards of Learning* results for all students, grades in all classes from the previous year, teacher notes, and any other pertinent information. Students are placed on a scale according to these data. **Any students falling into the lower quartile in any content area are scheduled to begin the year in the eighth-period intervention/support program.**

Additionally, throughout the year, **nine-week assessments are administered in all areas.** Performance on these assessments, as well as student performance on more frequently administered assessments, is used to move students in and out of the eighth-period program. This extensive use of data is a key factor in the success of the school's **"no failure" approach**. In student interviews, numerous students indicated that they had, at various times, been assigned to or made use of the eighth-period program. All cited its importance in their success.

Beyond the use of data to identify students in need of additional support, school leaders and teachers use data from student performance reports to evaluate both the effectiveness of programs and individual instruction. Teachers are encouraged to utilize student performance in their self-reflections as a major criterion for the determination of their own performance. School leaders use such data in the development of individual professional growth plans for the staff. There is evidence that this practice extends to the evaluation of school administrators. West Point teachers measure their own success by the results achieved by their students.

8. Transitions

Transition anxiety is a key factor in the underperformance of high school students. It is the school's responsibility to reduce this anxiety and challenges affecting students as they move between buildings or experience abrupt changes in expectations. West Point has little evidence of problems associated with transitions.

It would be easy to explain the absence of such issues as a consequence of the small size of the school.

This would be an inaccurate explanation. Many schools that have created small learning communities continue to experience problems with student engagement and student/adult relationships.

West Point largely has eliminated the problems of transition with thoughtful approaches to the integration of students into its culture. By the time students enter the high school, they have experienced a significant dose of what staff members refer to as the "West Point Way." Throughout the district, students are experiencing the caring, supportive culture that continues in the high school. Instructional opportunities bring many middle school students into high school classes, and frequent opportunities for middle school students to move through the high school sections of the building make the transition to full-time high school almost a "non-event."

This is not to say that the high school is without programs to assist incoming ninth graders. A **mentoring program offers support and guidance for students** identified as at-risk. The involvement of incoming ninth graders in **the development of a personalized learning plan** (along with members of their family) contributes to the sense that the high school will be a caring, nurturing, but nonetheless challenging experience.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

The leadership of West Point High School and the division at large has enjoyed remarkable stability. The current superintendent of schools has served for 18 years. The high school principal has served in that capacity for eight years and prior to becoming an administrator, taught in the division for 11 years.

Good schools are rarely without **strong and positive leadership**. West Point is no exception. The principal is a respected, dedicated, and gifted educator. His commitment to the continuation of the school's success and the maintenance of its exceptional reputation is clear. What is equally important is his understanding that the continuation of the school's success is related directly to the success of its students and staff. The principal works tirelessly to create the atmosphere in which this success is most likely. Teachers and members of the school leadership team cite the principal's collaborative approaches to problem solving and his unfailing commitment to high standards as a critical aspect of their success. "He frees us to do what we need to do—teach," remarked one of the teachers.

As in a number of other areas, the concept of leadership at West Point extends beyond traditional approaches and experiences. The principal explained that the success of the school was due, in large part, to the **sense of ownership and responsibility by the entire staff**. At West Point, one quickly learns that ownership is a dominant characteristic of the school. Staff interviews and observations reveal that the culture of the school is genuinely attributable to the **collective efforts of all staff members to maintain high expectations and positive relationships among students and faculty.**

This common sense of commitment and collaboration allows the schools to function effectively. This shared commitment has resulted in the ability to quickly and thoroughly analyze the impact of efforts and to adjust accordingly. There is no need for cumbersome committee reviews and recommendations. Results are reviewed collectively, data are analyzed, decisions are made quickly and their impact is evaluated right away. Time is precious to the faculty, and they use it accordingly.

The school enjoys remarkable **support from the West Point community**. Parents are actively involved. They participate in the work of the school, its planning, and its evaluation. School staff members value the cooperation, trust, and support of the community and work to ensure that the trust and support is deserved.

10. Professional Learning Community

The commitment to professional learning among the faculty extends well beyond the creation of professional learning communities. The intellectual and emotional commitment of the staff to "leaving no stone unturned" in the pursuit of quality experiences for their students is ingrained in the culture of the school. **School leaders and staff collectively identify common areas for exploration** based on the performance reports of the students. Annually, the staff explores identified topics and commits to the integration of such concepts in the classes. The implementation of the identified concepts and evaluation of their impact are critical components of the annual exploration process in which the staff meet during the last two weeks of summer to assess the placement of incoming students, their past performance, and the effectiveness of programs.

In addition to the collective explorations of the staff, faculty members work together within

department/content groups to bring improvements to their classes. There is a strong commitment to the recruitment and induction of high-quality staff. New staff members are mentored and provided with significant support in learning and adjusting to the "West Point Way." Faculty assume a significant role in identifying areas of need and support and, when necessary, in the development of remediation/intervention plans for struggling staff. Awards and recognition given to West Point teachers, along with the exceptionally high success rates of West Point students, provide ample evidence of the school's culture of continual professional development.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

West Point High School enjoys the fruits of a successful and highly articulated K-12 program. The commitment to high expectations, use of data for decision making, accountability, and student engagement are pervasive throughout the system. Of equal interest and importance is the success that the school enjoys with the relatively large number of tuition students who begin their West Point experiences in the ninth grade.

As described earlier, a key aspect of this success is the summer planning time during which all available data are analyzed and used to identify students who will need additional support to be successful. These students are then scheduled for the eighth-period support program. Students identified as performing in the lower quartile the previous year (based on a composite of performance data) are scheduled for this additional period. Additionally, as a result of nine-week assessments, and regular classroom assessments and observations, students may be scheduled for this support period at any time during the year. What adds significantly to the effectiveness of this intervention time is **the flexibility of the identification process, which allows any student throughout the year to both self-identify and/or be named to receive support during the eighth-period program.**

Lessons Learned

- **Small schools do not necessarily mean limited opportunities**. West Point offers a rich and robust program for its students by eliminating the conflicts caused by offering multiple program levels.

- In the search for personalization and high student engagement, West Point demonstrates that the key elements of an excellent school system are not the structures or organizational patterns that are used to create "smallness" (e.g., smaller house structures or families). Instead, it is **the attitude of staff that creates high-quality interactions** that lead to the kinds of positive relationships and levels of engagement found at West Point.

- The **involvement of the community** in the development and maintenance of an atmosphere of high expectations is important to school leaders and staff.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. In the area of career and technical education, I believe we are offering the right classes to give our students an edge. Over the years, we have replaced many of the traditional trade classes with much richer technology and career education choices. **Career and technical education is integrated into our academic program and not an alternative for students who wish to escape rigor**. Students exiting these classes have a range of opportunities, varying from engineering to industry certification.

2. **The school stresses discipline and accountability**. We believe that our culture is directly impacted by the standards we establish for discipline. We aim to push the expectations for proper behavior as far from our core beliefs as possible so as to protect our academic mission. We take on gum chewing, talking, and dress violations, to push violence and disrespect farther away from acceptability. We aim to educate every child, but will not allow one child to negatively alter the educational opportunities of the many.

3. The school has a **solid technology infrastructure**. The commitment to technology in our system has been strong. We have been able to equip and train our teachers to use our resources for improving instruction.

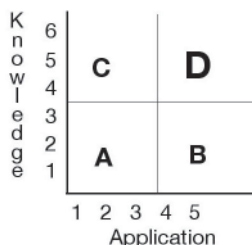# George Wythe High School
Wytheville, Virginia
Wythe County Public Schools
Prepared by International Center for Leadership in Education

A Model of

- culture of high expectations and support
- student engagement
- data-driven decisions
- strong, creative, committed leadership
- personalized learning
- modified block scheduling

Rigor/Relevance Framework

The Rigor/Relevance Framework gauges the effectiveness of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The vertical axis represents Bloom's Taxonomy. Teachers engaging students in thinking skills such as synthesis, analysis, and evaluation during daily instruction moves them from Quadrant A to Quadrant C. The horizontal axis represents the Application Model, which has five levels ranging from knowledge of the content to application of the content knowledge to real-world, unpredictable situations. Quadrant A crosses over to Quadrant B when content is integrated into other disciplines. Ideally, curriculum, instruction, and assessment will occur in Quadrant D, indicating that students are engaged in higher-order thinking and applying the content to real-world situations. Schools operating in Quadrant D are providing students with a highly rigorous, relevant educational experience.

By the Numbers: 2005-2006

Number of Students	438
White	90%
Black	10%
Hispanic	0%
Asian	6%
Economically Disadvantaged	25%
English Language Learners	0%
Made AYP	√
English Pass Rate	92%
Mathematics Pass Rate	81%
Graduation Rate	81%

Executive Summary

George Wythe High School (GWHS) is a comprehensive high school located in the town of Wytheville, Virginia. It was constructed in 1951 and named for George Wythe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and regarded as one of the founding fathers of the United States of America.

Wythe County is a rural, agricultural community with a population of 27,599. The school is located in the county seat, the largest incorporated town in the county (2000 Census population of 7,800). This location gives the school a different climate from the other two county high schools, because fewer George Wythe High School students come from a rural background. Many of the students' parents work in more than a dozen major industries located in and around Wytheville.

Approximately 120 course offerings are listed in the Wythe County Program of Studies. Of these, 103 are offered at the high school. Others are offered at Wythe County Technical Center, located adjacent to the high school's campus. GWHS shares several members of the faculty with Scott Memorial Middle School. Courses offered include general, career and technical, and accelerated. Advanced Placement courses are offered in American history, English, and calculus. Five courses, totaling a possible 32 college credits, are offered via dual-enrollment opportunities with Wytheville Community College.

More than 30 academic/career and technical/band teams and more than 20 sports teams are involved in a variety of competitions each year. To encourage participation, club days are provided each year for more than 20 clubs. Club days provide students with the opportunity to learn more about the many club offerings at the school through viewing presentations and meeting club members. More than 50 percent of George Wythe students participate in at least one club. More than 50 percent also participate in at least one sport. Students cite the availability of such opportunities as a major strength of the school.

George Wythe High School strives to achieve far more than the minimum proficiency levels. Consistent with this goal, the majority of students earn more than the credit minimums for each state-approved diploma. The school seeks to maintain its outstanding reputation by upholding a tradition of high academics, student success, and rich extracurricular programs. The school is rapidly developing a proud tradition of academic excellence to rival its traditional level of athletic performance.

GWHS represents an outstanding combination of the components that are used to identify model schools. The school leaders and staff accomplish this seamlessly and without reliance on "programmatic" solutions. A collegial and caring climate, an environment of high expectations, a strong system of student support, and the commitment to collaborative leadership has led to an exceptional experience for adults and students alike.

The leadership of the principal and faculty, along with the support of the community, has been a causal factor in the success of the school. The school's mission and beliefs outline the values of this learning community:

> The mission of George Wythe High School is to provide all students with the opportunity to pursue an education that will enable them to succeed in a changing world. All school personnel, students, families, and community
>> » develop challenging goals and hold high academic expectations
>> » work together to promote student achievement
>> » promote tolerance for individual differences to foster self-esteem, respect, and integrity necessary for a safe, positive learning environment.

Students and adults alike have internalized this commitment to excellence and high standards. Students report an atmosphere of mutual respect and support. Professional staff members demonstrate acute awareness of the needs of individual students.

1. School Culture

As noted, GWHS is a small school, with an enrollment of 438 students. Such size sometimes limits the variety of options available to students. Because of the commitment to each student, the school has developed a number of creative ways to provide students with access to challenging and unusual opportunities, including

- **individually tailored schedules** when students have scheduling conflicts
- providing options for students to schedule courses at other locations (dual enrollment at community colleges, programs at career and technical centers) or via **distance learning programs**
- independent study programs.

The culture of the school is defined by **a climate of high expectations** and the **commitment of the staff to the maintenance of an atmosphere of caring and support.** Teachers know each student by name. They are aware of the strengths, needs, and interests of all students, and this information is used to ensure that students are challenged and supported. It is clear that the adults in the George Wythe school community have accepted the need to **develop and maintain strong, supportive relationships with students**. Focus

group interviews with students validate that they value and respect such relationships. Students feel safe and respected by adults.

Teachers follow a strong belief that all students can excel in academics, sports, extracurricular activities, and their postgraduate lives. They devote many hours to providing students with individual attention. Teachers also volunteer to lead co-curricular programs on a regular basis. It is normal for faculty members to support students by attending student activities.

2. Core Academic Learning

GWHS students met federal Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements. They continue to exceed state averages in all tested areas by substantial margins. Recent changes in the inclusion program for special needs students are yielding promising results. Students have sustained this performance for the past three years. In English, 92 percent of students scored at or above the proficient level; in mathematics, 81 percent; in science, 87 percent; and in history and social science, 89 percent. In addition to impressive statistics at the proficient level, George Wythe students have performed well at advanced levels. On average, 65 percent of the students have graduated with a standard or Advanced Diploma and at least six college credits.

The array of course options and learning experiences available to George Wythe students belies the size of the school. The school focuses attention on **strong core courses with minimal variations within these course offerings**. More than half (52 percent) of George Wythe students graduate with three or more years of a foreign language.

In recent years, the school, staff, and students have been recognized with the following awards:

- The school has two national board-certified teachers.
- An English teacher was voted best high school teacher by the readers of the local newspaper.
- The Scholastic Bowl team placed 11th in the nation.
- A Future Farmers of America student placed second in the nation, and first in state competition.
- FBLA had two students in marketing education placed in the top 10 in state competition.
- FBLA had six students place first in state competition. A GWHS student will serve as a member of the FBLA student board next school year.
- Various sports teams have participated in and won regional or state championships.

3. Stretch Learning

The guidance staff at GWHS plays a critical role in the school's environment of high expectations. Guidance staff members act as "gate keepers" for the scheduling of any courses that do not meet standards of rigor. All students are encouraged to attempt advanced courses regardless of their previous levels of achievement.

GWHS is a leader in a growing trend to use dual-enrollment opportunities for its students as a viable alternative to Advanced Placement courses. The Virginia articulation agreement outlines that courses completed successfully at the state's community colleges must be accepted into the state's four-year institutions of higher learning. This represents an opportunity for substantial financial savings for George Wythe students and their families.

George Wythe students exceed state averages in a number of quality indicators. For the past three years

- George Wythe students exceeded the required number of hours of instruction per year.
- Students in the standard diploma program exceeded the state average of credits earned.
- Students in the Advanced Studies Diploma program exceeded the state average of credits earned.
- George Wythe is number one in the county for the percentage of students (65 percent) who graduate with at least six college credits.
- More than half of George Wythe students (52 percent) graduate with three or more years of study in a world language, again exceeding state averages.

Students have access to a wide array of challenging programs. There is a close relationship with the local community college and dual-enrollment programs are rigorous and well attended. Additionally, the

school is adjacent to the county's technical center. This proximity allows George Wythe students to participate in a variety of offerings, and the school's Tech Prep program offers substantial opportunities to obtain industry certification in technology-focused programs.

The results of this atmosphere of high expectation are reflected in the statistics pertaining to the accomplishments of the school's graduates. Virginia requires 22 credits for a standard diploma and 24 credits for an Advanced Studies Diploma. George Wythe students in the standard diploma program average 25 credits, while students in the advanced diploma program average more than 29 credits.

George Wythe teachers have devoted considerable time to the development of activities that are both rigorous and relevant. Lessons/units that culminate with real-world applications and/or demonstrations have been designed and implemented.

4. Student Engagement

GWHS represents an outstanding example of student engagement. The relationships between students and adults are mutually respectful and supportive. The same is true for the relationships among students, as well as among staff members. The development of these relationships is not the result of any individual school-sponsored program. Rather, the relationships develop as a part of the school's culture of warmth and caring. Students and adults recognize that mutual respect and support are important values within the school as well as in the community.

Interviews with staff members reveal that they accept and develop a variety of roles in their relationships with students. They act as teachers, mentors, counselors, parents, and friends. Many indicated that these roles extend into their lives within the George Wythe community where they, and parents, have accepted responsibilities for all students. Teachers regularly reported that their work is not confined to the classroom, but extends to the halls, the community, and to participation in after-school activities.

Typically, the existence of strong, positive relationships among adults and students are associated with a tradition of strong administrative leadership. Atypically, the administrative positions at GWHS have experienced significant turnover. While the current principal and his assistant are highly respected by the staff, they are new to their positions. In interviews, staff members discussed that the high turnover in these administrative positions forced the development of strong faculty leadership.

While undoubtedly the size of the school and its relationship to the community are key factors in the high levels of student engagement, the teachers have devoted substantial effort to ensuring that the quality and level of instruction is highly relevant. The school recognizes and rewards academic performance with regularly scheduled assemblies and awards ceremonies. Both teachers and students mentioned the importance of these events in the focus group discussions.

5. Personal Skill Development

GWHS provides a wide variety of independent and self-directed learning options. These include extensive dual-enrollment programs and a flexible approach to meeting the needs of students via scheduling modifications and independent study. In all cases, George Wythe students are encouraged to work closely with an adult. This approach continues to extend the positive relationships and ensures that students are provided with the level of direction and support necessary for their success.

George Wythe offers a wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities designed to provide students with the chance to explore personal growth and leadership opportunities. The fact that many George Wythe faculty also serve as coaches for the co-curricular and extracurricular programs was frequently mentioned as an important way in which the relationships between adults and students were enhanced. Adults and students alike noted that these experiences extended their confidence in the adults to be present for them in times of need.

More than 50 percent of George Wythe students have participated in at least one club over the past three years. Additionally, several school programs are connected to outside courses such as Future Farmers of America, Future Business Leaders of America, Junior ROTC, and others.

6. High-Quality Curriculum and Instruction

The school leadership team at George Wythe spends considerable effort to find, induct and maintain quality

instructional staff. The staff represents a blend of highly experienced long-time teachers and younger faculty. There is a conscious effort to recruit and keep staff members who mirror the diversity of the community and the student body.

George Wythe has provided a strong core program for all students. There are minimal options for students to opt out of the most rigorous programs. While a student in mathematics may opt to split a two-year course in algebra, this does not preclude the completion of higher-level mathematics courses to satisfy the school's graduation requirement. Administrators and faculty members openly discussed the school's initial state testing experience. Results in English were disappointing. George Wythe staff explained that these disappointing results served as an incentive to revise the school's curriculum as well as the staff's instructional approaches. The revision process included

- a review of the school's curriculum
- an analysis of the state assessment
- the completion of a "gap analysis" identifying areas that were not being taught
- a revision of the curriculum guides
- the development of pacing guides
- the establishment of benchmarks for desired performance.

Today, 92 percent of George Wythe students have achieved the level of proficient on the state graduation test. The students have averaged more than 85 percent proficiency in each of the past three years. All faculty members provide help to students experiencing difficulty. Resources include an instructional support team, intervention programs consisting of group remediation/credit recovery courses, one-on-one tutorial assistance, and scheduled learning skill classes. Students may be assigned to study skills classes for long-term help or for short-term interventions. Support programs, with district-provided transportation, are available during the summer.

7. Use of Data at Classroom and Building Levels

Virginia has a strong alignment of standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments. GWHS makes extensive use of the materials provided by the state's Department of Education in the development of course guides. The process used to develop such materials is coordinated at each building level, and students enjoy the results of a corresponding sequence of learning outcomes and experiences.

As previously indicated, it was the return of the school's first *Standards of Learning* (SOL) test results that provided the impetus for the current commitment to high expectation and high levels of student performance. Staff interviews regularly mentioned the competitiveness of the faculty as a driving force in the initiative to improve student performance and to constantly seek ways to improve this performance.

The George Wythe staff utilizes reports from the state's assessment system to refine programs, develop instruction, and identify students in need of additional support. All staff members, regardless of teaching assignment, accept responsibility for the performance of students.

Beyond the use of data to identify students in need of additional support, school leaders and staff use data from student performance reports to evaluate the effectiveness of both their programs and their individual instruction. Teachers are encouraged to utilize student performance in their self-reflections as a major criterion for the determination of their own performance. School leaders use such data in the development of individual professional growth plans for the staff. This practice extends to the evaluation of school administrators.

8. Transitions

Transitional anxiety can affect students as they move between buildings or experience abrupt changes in expectations. In some schools, this anxiety has caused the deterioration of student relationships and/or engagement. However, there is little evidence of problems associated with transitions at GWHS. It would be inaccurate to explain the absence of such issues as an effect of the small school size. Many schools that have created small learning communities continue to experience problems with student engagement and student/adult relationships. The difference at GWHS may lie in how responsive staff members are to new students.

The district also encourages eighth-grade students to schedule classes in several areas at the high school. These experiences bring eighth-grade students into contact with both the school and the teachers before they officially enter ninth grade. Staff members report that high school students share their positive experience with the eighth graders, creating a sense of comfort even before the incoming ninth-grade students attend the school full-time.

In addition to the opportunity to take classes in the high school building, there are numerous orientation programs for students and their parents. GWHS students from various athletic and academic teams visit other schools in the district to engage elementary and middle school students in a number of academic support programs (e.g., reading and tutoring). These contacts were cited as a way in which older students model and promote the atmosphere of high academic expectations that the younger students will encounter at the high school.

9. Leadership/Systems Approach

The current leadership at GWHS appears to have provided stability and strong leadership support after a prolonged period of administrative instability. In focus group interviews, staff members cited the ways in which they had overcome problems associated with this instability and the positive influence of the current leadership.

George Wythe has a strong and diverse administrative team. The school's guidance staff plays a critical role in ensuring that students schedule the most challenging of courses and encouraging students to stretch themselves in their choice of diploma programs and scheduling options. The school's principal and assistant principal provide excellent direction, support, and expectations for instruction. Teachers noted the importance of regular observations of their classes and the consistency of responses to student behavioral issues.
The principal's commitment to the school's culture of high expectation and his deep understanding of the relationship between his leadership and the maintenance of the climate at the school appear to have added significant value to the pre-existing commitment of the faculty to high expectations and high academic performance. The principal demonstrates a solid understanding that the continuation of the school's success is directly related to the success of its students and its staff.

The concept of leadership at George Wythe extends beyond traditional approaches and experiences. The school enjoys remarkable support from the George Wythe community. Parents participate in the daily workings of the school, its planning, and its evaluation. The school staff values the cooperation, trust, and support of the community, and works to ensure that the trust and support is deserved.

10. Professional Learning Community

Although there are no formal professional learning communities set up at Wythe, there is significant evidence that staff members are aggressive about expanding their skills and actively seeking information and learning experiences that will enhance student performance. School leaders and staff collectively identify common areas for exploration based on the performance reports of the students. The implementation and evaluation of impact are critical components of the exploration process.

Staff members take advantage of locally available courses offered at the nearby community college, through the Blue Ridge West Consortium, and the University of Virginia. Recent use of instructional technology resource teachers has increased the staff's access to and uses of instructional technology.

11. Meeting the Needs of Struggling Learners

George Wythe High School enjoys the fruits of a successful and highly articulated K-12 program. The commitment to high expectations, use of data for decision making, accountability, and student engagement are pervasive throughout the system.

Students and teachers alike noted the ready availability of support for students who are struggling, whether their problems are defined as long- or short-term. Students have access to specialized study skills sessions that provide targeted support instruction to both special needs and nonclassified students.

Students identified the willingness of teachers to work with them on areas of difficulty and/or interest as a major strength of the school. The willingness of staff members to provide assistance and the use of targeted interventions allow students to feel confident as they prepare for the state's assessments.

Inclusion classes are an important part of the school's learning experiences for special needs students. Faculty and administrators have targeted additional training and refinement of these experiences as an area for continued attention.

Lessons Learned

- Small schools do not equate to limited opportunities. GWHS offers a rich and robust program for its students by eliminating the conflicts caused by offering multiple program levels.

- In the search for personalization and high student engagement, GWHS demonstrates that the key elements are not the structures or organizational patterns that are used to create "smallness," such as smaller house structures or families. Rather, it is the attitude of the staff that creates high-quality interactions.

- While strength and stability of leadership are often viewed as critical to the success of model schools, GWHS presents an interesting example of how the leadership function can be filled by faculty as well as by administrative staff. The emergence of new and extremely committed administrative leadership within the school has further enhanced the development of the leadership role.

- The use of assessment data can be a positive force in the development of benchmarks for high expectations. When faced with the ways in which a school might respond to disappointing assessment data, the staff at George Wythe did not blame changing student attitudes, values, or other societal issues. Rather they looked to the factors in their control and used these to focus on enhancing instruction and improving student achievement.

Principal's List of the School's Three Greatest Strengths

1. Staff commitment to having a successful school with high-achieving students. As discussed during the site visit, GWHS staff members commit 100 percent of their efforts to ensuring success on student passing and state assessments. Without this total commitment, there is no way our school would be where it is today.

2. Student engagement and involvement. At GWHS, the majority of students choose to participate in activities that help them to become well-rounded individuals. Teachers and students encourage involvement and do not dissuade each other from striving for the next level.

3. District level support. Our central office continues to encourage and fund professional development for staff and student success. Not only is this the expected norm across the division (collaboration between district schools), but staff members are encouraged to attend state and national professional development activities as well. GWHS is fortunate to have district administrators who are willing to lead school administration to continued school improvement.

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